

The book cover features a dark green textured background. At the top, there is a decorative border with a repeating geometric pattern. Below this, a large, ornate window is depicted with a central floral motif. To the right of the window, a red curtain with a floral pattern is partially drawn. The title and author's name are printed in gold and red ink, respectively, in a stylized font.

ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL
AUSTIN CLARE

All Saints' Sunday Schools,
HINDLEY.



Presented to

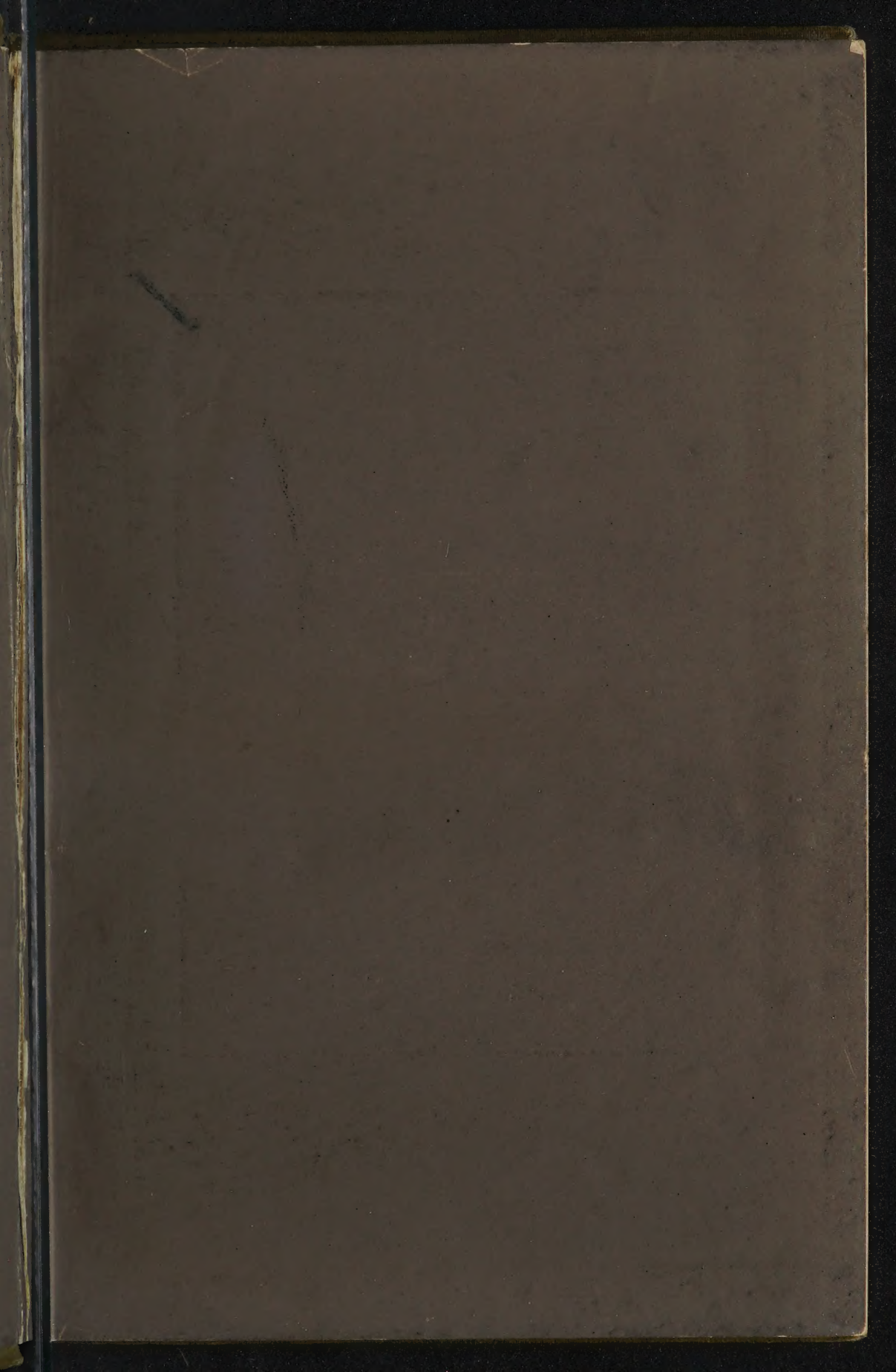
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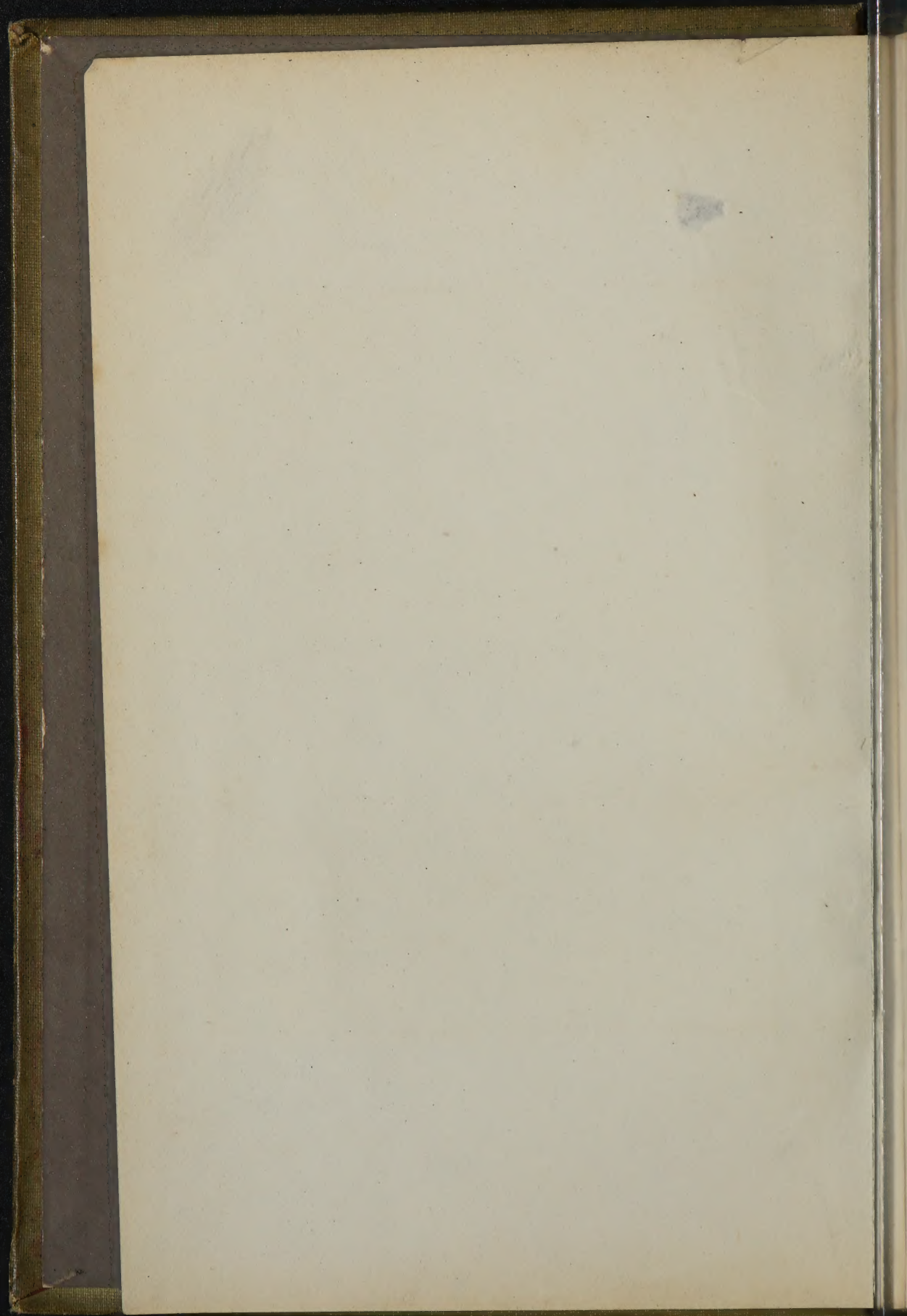
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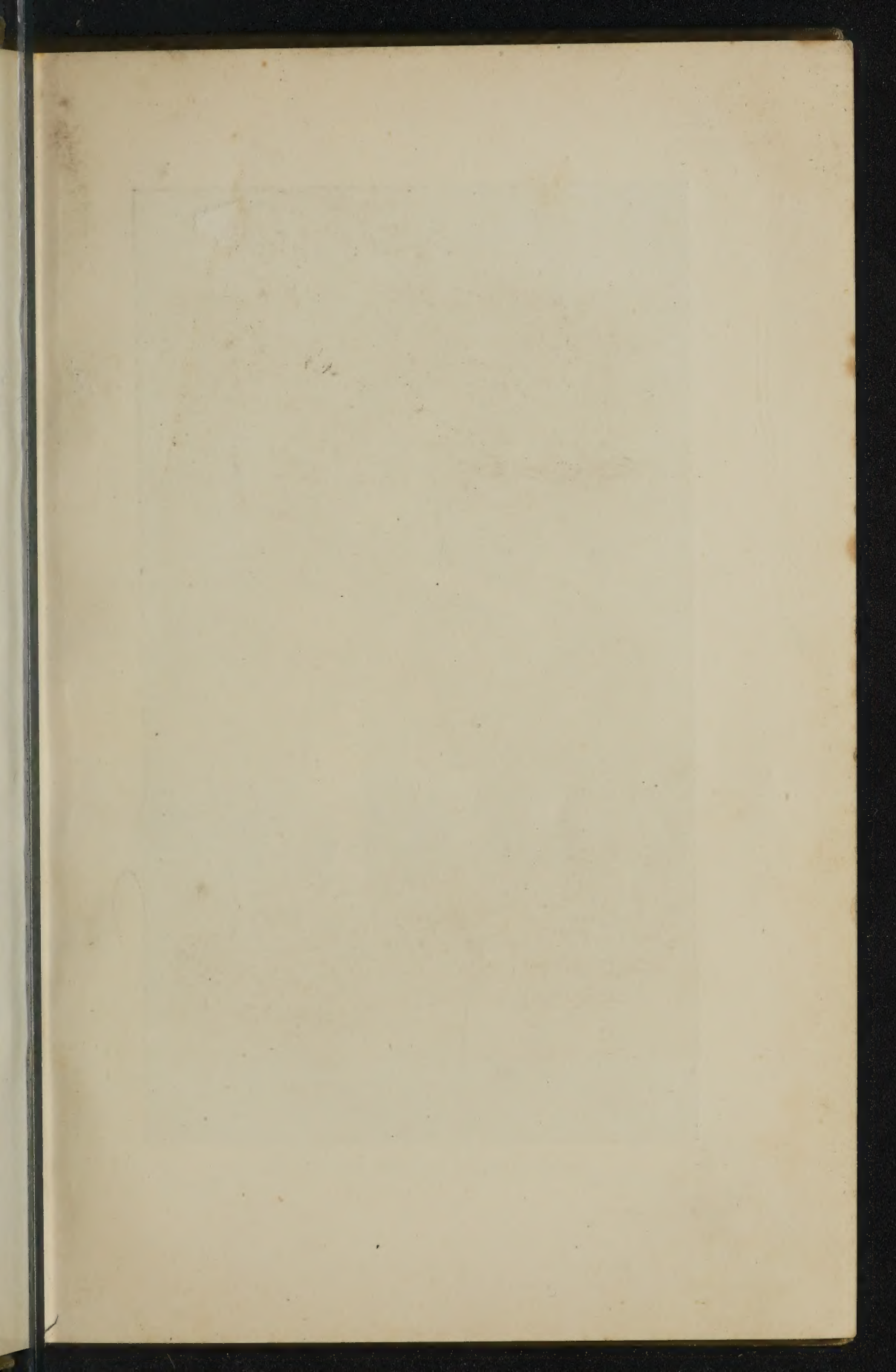
VIII Class.

1st Prize.

JANUARY, 1886









Frontispiece. "MAMMY, THIS IS MY BABY, MY VERY OWN."

Page 13.

ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

A Portrait

*DRAWN FROM LIFE AND COLOURED
FROM IMAGINATION.*

BY

AUSTIN CLARE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CARVED CARTOON," "THE ROYAL BANNER,"
"THE BELLS OF FREIBURG," ETC.

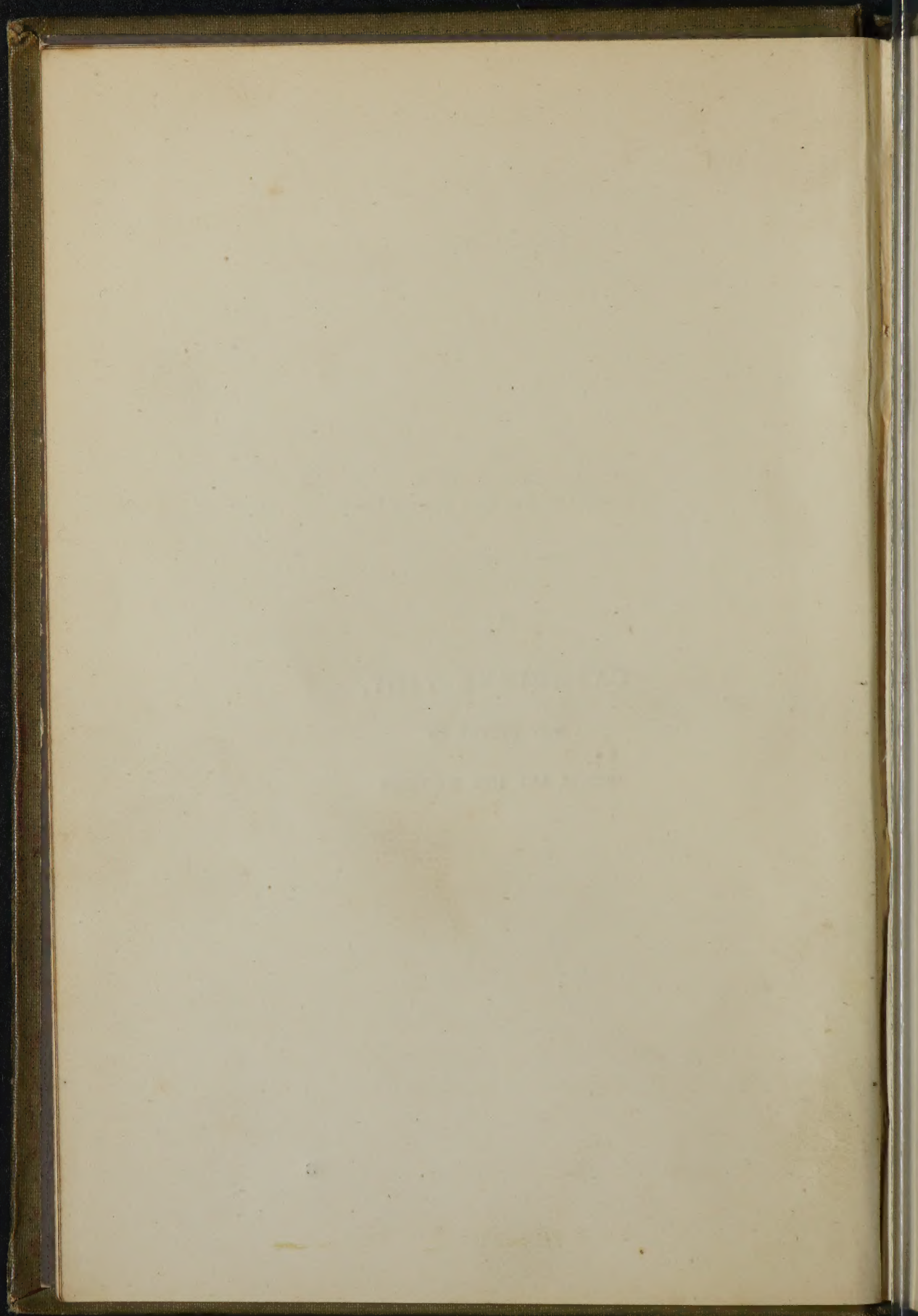
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FOOT 2 ONLY DRY 17-18

"Be thou faithful unto Death,
And I will give thee a Crown of Life."

TO
CATHERINE TIDY,
THE FRIEND OF
BESSIE AND HER MISTRESS.





ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL.



INTRODUCTION.

“**S**O she’s gone, dearie, gone, and we can never do a hand’s stroke of work for her any more ; that’s what it is that hurts me so !” And my grandmother’s old and faithful servant threw herself into her chair by the kitchen fire, and rocked herself backwards and forwards in restless grief.

We had just returned from the funeral, and the quiet little house in a side street of Gateshead, where mistress and maid had spent nearly all their days, felt lonely and sad, as must always be the case when the head has been taken away. I took off my bonnet, unloosed that of the old servant, and we changed places for once in a way—I making the tea, she sitting and waiting for it.

The tea did her good, I think, for after she had drunk her second cup she calmed down a little, and began to talk.

She was a sweet-faced old woman, with grey hair just showing beneath the border of the frilly white cap she always wore; bright blue-grey eyes, and a mouth at the same time firm and tender. As long as I can recall anything, I can remember Bessie Ellis bustling about of a morning in her well-starched lilac prints, or sitting down with her knitting, after my grandmother's early dinner, in her plain brown stuff, snowy cap and apron, and white kerchief pinned across her chest.

Every time I went to visit my kinswoman in Gateshead, there was Bessie just the same as ever, with her kindly welcome, and little gala dish of "singing-hinnies" * for tea; for she was not one to change, and with her, service was for a lifetime.

"One of the old school." Yes, that was what my grandmother's elderly friends always called her, shaking their heads over the degeneracy of the younger generation of servants; and though I have more faith in the girls of the present than to believe that the stuff of which good servants are made no longer exists among

* Round girdle-cakes.

them, yet I must allow that Bessie Ellis was one in a thousand, and that she was well calculated to serve as a model for those who would aspire to the nobility of true service—a noble thing indeed when we consider that the King of kings was among us as “One that serveth.”

I had often thought that I should like to draw Bessie's portrait and send it out, after she has passed from among us, as the dear old woman's legacy to those who follow her profession; that, looking on it, they might be induced to follow her steps. And that evening of her mistress's funeral, she gave me the opportunity of doing it in the most natural way; for, as if to ease her mind, she began talking of what her mistress and she had been to each other, and a very little management brought out the whole of her life's recollections. It was a touching story, with its stormy beginning, and its little thread of tender romance, running like a silver weft through a piece of grey homespun; for the middle and end were uniform enough in texture and colouring. A commonplace, quiet life to have started so romantically, some people would say; but are fidelity, self-denial, and steadfast adherence to duty, regardless of consequences, so very commonplace after all? I wish they were!

Ah, dear old Bessie, I think Keble's words are true of you for one—

“Meek souls there are, who little dream
Their daily strife an angel's theme,
Or that the rod they take so calm
Shall prove in heaven a martyr's palm.”

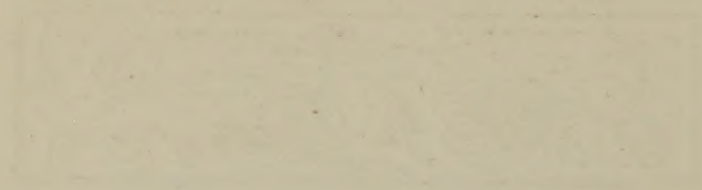
I at least am the better for the life's story I heard that night in the little house at Gateshead ; so let me set it down for others to read, as much as possible as it fell from Bessie's own lips ; only softening the wording a little, lest south-country folk should be repelled, and arranging the portrait so far as to suit its present frame.





PART I.
CHILDHOOD.





PART I
CHILDHOOD

1880



CHAPTER I.

ROBIN'S BABY.

YES, she was a good mistress, was your grandmother, a real good one (began old Bessie), and since you would like to hear all about it, I'll just tell you, dearie ; it'll ease my heart a bit, maybe. From the very beginning? Well, I can't just say that my memory is very clear about that ; bairns of a year old cannot keep things on their mind, you know, like older folk ; but I've heard the story of my finding so often, that it's nearly as good as first-hand, and so I'll just tell it you as I heard it myself.

You'll maybe have heard tell of John Redford ? No? Well, miss, he was my first friend, and a right good one too. He was a milkman, and went about the town night and morning, with a little cart and a pony to draw it, so keeping

his family, which was a large one, in as much comfort as he knew how. He had some customers, too, on the other side of the town moor, and many a stormy drive he had, crossing it to carry them their milk ; for, rain or shine, John Redford's cart was never known to miss. One night, though, he remembers for the stormiest he was ever out in. His missus—that's the wife—was sore against his going, for he had a bad cold on him, and the sky threatened snow.

Nothing would stop John, however ; and moreover there was his little son to fetch home from the grandmother's across the moor.

A cold night it was, and no mistake. John felt that, as soon as ever he was out of the warm house ; and the pony felt it too, and set off faster than was good for the milk. Well, he got all his customers served, and little Robin—that was his eldest boy—called for, and set off home again before more than just a dredging of snow had fallen. No sooner, however, had he got well on to the moor, than down it came in good earnest, blotting out the lights of the town, and falling in showers so thick that you could not see a star. The wind moaned over the moor, carrying the flakes into the pony's face and well-nigh blinding him. John, too, was pretty well buffeted ; but he drew his cap over his eyes and

his comforter about his mouth, saw that little Robin was well sheltered, as he sat in his father's plaid among the milk-tins in the cart, spoke to the pony a few cheery words, and pressed on boldly.

About the middle of the moor there is a pond. It was half-frozen that night, half in a state of slush with partly melted snow and ice.

John tried his best in the darkness to steer clear of it, for the ground was marshy all around. But what with the snow underfoot and in the air, it was not so easy to keep the road. He got nearer to it than he liked before he well knew, and was just going to turn the pony's head from the grey shimmer of the cold water, which was all he could see, when he heard a cry.

He stopped a moment. The wind was howling with that dismal sound it has when the snow is half choking it; the cold water was splashing up against the ice, and gurgling among the rushes on the brink. That was all which was to be heard. John began to think he was mistaken, and was just going on again, when once more came the cry—like a long wail, he said it was, which nearly froze any warm blood which was left in his veins.

What could it be?

He thought of spirits, and of the "good

people," of will-o'-the-wisps, and such-like; he shivered with more than cold, and would fain have gone on and never heeded. But John was a good man and a kind, and the thought that this might be a human creature in distress kept him back.

The pony was well used to standing at customers' doors, and at a word from its master it stood still now, as quiet as any lamb; while John, with his heart in his mouth, went up to the water's edge, from which the cry seemed to come.

It was not snowing quite so thickly now, and John could see the water and the rushes by the dim cold light of the fallen snow. There was a piece of ice drifting about near the edge, and on this ice was what seemed to be a bundle of something. John could guess now what it was, for the wailing cry broke out again, and he had had enough of that at home to know that it was a baby's voice. Not without a wetting himself, did he draw out the poor little half-drowned, half-frozen creature, and carry it back to the cart, where he put it in beside little Robin, and made the same plaid serve for both.

That baby was myself, miss—poor little wretched, outcast thing! John Redford always said he thought some unhappy mother, who had no right to such a possession, had put me there

to drown, not having the heart to do it outright herself. Ah, miss, 'tis sad to think there are such mothers in the world ; and perhaps it is as well for me that I never knew mine.

It was pretty to see, John said, how little five-year-old Robin—who knew what babies were, naving had to mind the twins, that came next below him, before he was well beyond babyhood himself—took care of me that night. He cuddled me into his little arms under the plaid, hushed my cries with baby talk, and began singing the cradle-song his mother had taught him, careless of snow and wind.

When the cart came home, and John, rather nervous, most likely, as to how his wife would receive the little new-comer, lifted Robin and me out together, the boy forestalled any objections, by toddling in at once to show the baby to “mother.”

“Mammy,” he said in his sweet little voice, as he stood before her, holding me tight with both arms—“mammy, this is *my* baby, my very own. You'll let me keep her, won't you? And, after that, Mrs. Redford said she could not speak of the workhouse, so long as both ends could by any possible stretching be made to meet.

They had me christened (it being probable no one had attended to that), and John Redford, his

wife, and her sister stood sponsors. I was called after the baby, Elizabeth ; and to give me a surname which was wanting to me, little Robin hit on the plan of repeating the first two syllables of my first name. He was very proud of his invention, dear little fellow! and so I am down in the parish registers as Elizabeth Ellis—christened and surname in one.





CHAPTER II.

ON THE QUAYSIDE.

THOSE were happy years I spent with the good Redfords. Poor they were, but they never grudged me my share and share alike with their own children. There were seven of us : myself, Robin, two older girls—one blind, the other weak and sickly from birth—the twin boys, regular little pickles, and a younger child, also a girl.

We lived in a steep street sloping down to the river Tyne on the Gateshead side—*chares* * they call them—and many a race we have had down to the water to see the ships go by. Robin always said he would like to be a sailor, when those tall-masted vessels came in from abroad, with their cargoes of fruit from Antwerp, or

* Peculiar to Newcastle. A narrow alley, generally leading to the river.

round Dutch cheeses from Rotterdam. It made our mouths water sometimes to see the blue and yellow plums, with the bloom still on them, carried ashore in baskets; but "father," as I called John Redford with the rest, had seldom a penny to spare, and such-like dainties were not for us.

Our house was a very tiny one—just two mites of rooms, and a shed where the pony and cart were kept. The cows which gave the milk that father sold were not his own; they belonged to a farmer outside the town, and father had to set off early every morning to fetch the full tins away and take them round to his customers.

After that was done he worked at odd jobs on the farm or the quayside, and when evening came, pony had to be harnessed, and he was off again. We did not see much of father, he worked too hard for that; but he had always a kind word for all of us.

"Mother" was kind too, in her way, but it was not such a pleasant way as father's; she saw so much of us, you see—too much, I have often thought since; for children do not consider what a sad trial their constant presence in a house must be, and school did not claim us so constantly in those days. She was a notable woman, and was always trying to make the house clean,

while we were no less given to making it dirty. Think of that! I can feel for her now, I can.

I was Robin's special child; he had appropriated me as a baby, and he never forgot that he had a claim upon me, and I on him. He it was who taught me to walk, and who saw that I was properly treated by the other children, not only of the family, but of the neighbourhood. His first fight was in my defence, and he never seemed to care so much for other companionships as for mine. Everything was shared with me, and I can't tell you how I loved my boy-protector. He was one to be proud of—so gentle and yet so manly. I have never met his like.

When Robin was about ten years old, and I was six, the accident happened to John Redford which was the beginning of our troubles. I can remember about it quite well, though I was such a wee lassie at the time, because of its being the first occasion on which Robin drove the milk-cart—with me to help him, of course, for he seldom went anywhere without me.

It was a hot summer afternoon, and Robin and I and the twins were playing as usual on the quayside. The tide was flowing in, carrying the salt water up the river, and lapping drowsily against the green-coated stonework where the vessels lay at anchor, some unlading their

cargoes, some taking them on board. There were many foreign sailors about, calling to each other in their different languages; some had scarlet caps on their dark heads, which I thought very pretty, and fine gold rings in their ears. Father was there too, helping to lade a vessel with coal, and whistling our Newcastle song, "The Keel Row," all the time.

On either side the river, tall old houses stood rank on rank up the hill, with St. Nicholas' spire crowning those on the further side, pointing up towards the sky, where a veil of smoke just smirched the blue. It's a canny old town is Newcastle, dearie, and that I'll maintain against any south-country folk, be they who they may; but there's no denying it's a trifle smoky. Well, well, the best of us have our drawbacks; and if a man may smoke, what call has one to find fault with a town?

Robin and I were playing at sailors, as he liked to do. There was a barrel, whose side had been stove in, lying handy, and Robin was standing beside it, pretending to be captain, heaving away at a bit of rope he had found and tied to it, and shouting out commands to the twins and me, who were collecting the bits of coal and ballast that lay about the quay, and making believe to lade the cargo, as father was doing to the big

ship not far off. I can see Robin now as he stood there, tugging away at the rope, very red in the face, with his fair hair tossing in the breeze which came up the river, and his little brown bare feet planted firmly on the sun-warmed ground. I can hear his bold fresh voice singing out the "Yo, heave ho!" which bigger lungs than his were bawling on the scores of vessels which lay in the river.

"Now, Bess," he shouted, "look alive, lass—*lad*, I mean—the tide'll serve directly, and we must drop down to Tynemouth afore dark. Steady, lads—steady; keep her straight in the water; she's lurching to one side. D'ye see? Yo, heave ho, my hearties!"

How it happened, I do not exactly know, for my back was turned; but somehow the rotten rope-end gave way, there was a sharp cry, and when I looked round, Robin was nowhere to be seen.

The people, however, came running up from all sides, and collected like a swarm of bees at the edge of the quay, just where the vessel rode at anchor which father was lading. I ran with them, squeezed myself in towards the front of the crowd, and looked down, as the rest were doing, into the narrow lane of dark water which lay between the quay and the black side of the

ship. There I saw a sight which made my heart come into my mouth, as the saying is ; namely, Robin's face, white and scared, looking up from the darkness, and one little brown hand clutching at the green weed which clung to the water-worn stones of the quayside.

"Hold on, my laddie, hold on !" shouted a sailor from the crowd. "Here, chuck him a rope-end ! Quick ! he's letting go. Quick, I say ; I can't reach him with my hand !"

The sailor had pushed some of the crowd out of the way, and was sprawling full length on the stones, reaching over into the narrow gulf.

Just then the weed to which Robin was clinging gave way, and he sank with a piercing cry.

"There's no room to jump in," I heard somebody say through the singing in my ears, and then there came another cry from on board the vessel. Father had found out what had happened, and was throwing himself over the side.

"Heart alive, man ! dinna do that. There's not room, I say !" exclaimed a voice again. "There, he's done it—I kent he would," went on the sailor, as father leapt in, and, never heeding a cruel blow from the projecting bowsprit of the next vessel, dived down into the dark water after Robin.

He must have dived under the ship, I think,

for when he came up again he was in a clearer place, some little distance off; and, oh joy! he was holding Robin. The rope which had been so long in coming was thrown then, and the father and son were hoisted on shore.

Robin was quite insensible, still clutching a piece of the green weed tightly in his hand. I thought he was dead, and sobbed and cried bitterly; but he soon came round, and sat on the stones in the sunshine, staring in bewilderment at the kindly faces of the sailors who stood around. Father sat very quietly on a heap of planks, looking even more dazed than Robin, and quite as pale.

"Come, man, thy little chap's all right now; take him home to his mammy," said some one. But father did not seem to hear.

"Go and change thy clothes," said another, "and get the lad into a dry suit; see how he's dripping! Warm as it is, he might catch his death, if he didn't change after such a ducking."

"Catch his death," murmured father, and tried to rise, but fell back with a groan.

They carried him home, Robin and I following. The twins had run on before, and had told mother enough to set her running down the chare in a terrible fright.

Well, I don't remember the rest so clearly;

but the doctor was called, and said father had crushed his knee and hurt his side, and that he feared it would be a bad business.

That evening our customers went without their milk, and the next morning Robin drove the cart for the first time.





CHAPTER III.

THE MILK-CART.

HOW proud we were!

Father was still in a good deal of pain, but he exerted himself to give Robin full directions, to which he listened very attentively, and took in readily enough; for he was a sharp boy, and had, besides, several times gone with father when he went his rounds. I had never been before.

We harnessed Polly, the pony, and set off to the farm in the early hours of as bonnie a morning as I have ever looked upon. Perhaps it was because I had never before been in the country so early in the morning that, in spite of being such a bairn, it made so great an impression upon me; perhaps it was owing to the great occasion, for such I felt it to be; anyhow, that drive with Robin stands out like a picture

on my memory—even now, Miss Fanny, even now.

The clocks were striking six as we left the streets behind us; St. Nicholas, with its rich clear note, leading the way; then all the other churches striking in, as though eager to tell the news before it should be all out. The place was wonderfully clear of smoke; at that early hour few fires were alight, and the canny town was younger, and smoked fewer pipes than now-a-days.

The early sunshine fell on the river, tinting the mist that rose from the water, till it glistened like the lining of an oyster-shell, and the water flashed through like silver. They call it "Coaly Tyne," and it generally deserves its name; but when I read in the Book, of the river which waters the Holy City above, somehow it is always of the Tyne I think—as we saw it that morning. Don't smile, Miss Fanny, honey; I'm a Tyneside woman, born and bred, and I love the old river, smutty as it often is. Then the grass and trees,—to what shall I liken them? Every blade and every leaf were hanging wet with dew, and just laughing for joy in the very sun's face, so that it was good to see them. There were wild roses in the hedges, and the smell was beautiful as we drove along the road.

And the birds—eh dear, but they sounded happy, calling and talking to each other like innocent children, and then bursting out into song, swelling their little throats fit to burst, with the crowd of notes.

They were mowing in the home meadow of the farm we were bound for, and I can hear the *swish* of the scythe now, and smell the wet sweetness of the grass and flowers, as they fell in long neat ranks upon the ground. Eh, Miss Fanny, it's strange what a bairn can remember! I don't pay so much attention now-a-days; but *then* it was all so new, and Robin and I saw it all together. Ay, there's a deal in that.

The mistress and her daughters were milking the cows in the big farmyard, as we drove up to the gate. The patient creatures, how still they stood, still munching the grass and clover they had been busy with when the yard-boy drove them from the field. The mistress got up from her three-legged stool in a big hurry when she saw pony coming round the corner, and—

"John Redford," she says, "whatever's come to you that you never turned up yestere'en? Eh me! and it's not John after all," she went on, catching sight of Robin holding the reins as steady as may be. "Why, where's your father, my lad?"

"Please, ma'am, he's hurt hisself," says Robin, getting down and helping me out, then pulling the curl on his forehead, as he had been taught to do. "It was all along of saving me out of the water. And, please, he said I was to say he'd been too bad to think of a message last night; but he hopes you'll let me drive the milk round till he's better."

"*You!* Mercy on us, a bairn like you!" cried the farmer's wife in dismay, eyeing Robin from top to toe, as though she wanted to guess his inches.

Robin's fair face got very red, but he said quite quietly, "I'm not big, I know, mistress; but I'm ten years old last birthday, please. I am indeed; I wouldn't tell you a lie," he added, as she paused before answering; and then I could hear the tremble in my little man's voice, and see a glister in his honest eyes, and I went close and slipped my hand into his.

The mistress's face grew kinder.

"And who's the bit lassie?" she asked, looking at me. "Your sister?"

"No, ma'am; my baby," says Robin, as innocent as can be.

Then the smile which had been growing on the mistress's face, spread all over, and she laughed outright.

"Oh ay, I mind now," she said. "John Redford told me about his foundling, and I told him the work—— But never mind what I said. And do you want to drive the milk too, honey?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Blessings on us! Well, we shall see—we shall see. You may do it this morning, anyhow, as you *are* here, and we'll see how you get on.—Mat, get them each a slice of bread and treacle to eat till we're ready;" and with this order to the yard-boy, she went back to her milking.

How important we felt when, the full tins having been put into the cart, we drove away, amid many warnings from the mistress to be "canny." That word means a deal in Newcastle, you know, and stands for many a sentence which would be needed elsewhere.

"Be easy, ma'am," called back Robin, with the bright pretty smile which few could resist; and then we rounded the corner and lost sight of the farm.

The first of father's customers whom we had to serve was a doctor, who always breakfasted at seven o'clock, so as to start early on his rounds. When Robin drew up the cart at his door he was already in his dining-room, studying a big medical book by the window. I know what it was, for, when Robin got down to give in

the milk at the door, he called to him to ask how father was ; and when Robin had answered, he put one hand on his shoulder and the other under his chin, lifted up the little lad's rosy face and studied it long and silently.

"Look here, my boy," he said, when, as Robin put it, he must have got him well by heart ; "d'ye see this head in my book?" and, as Robin told me afterwards, he showed him the picture of a head all ruled through with lines, and letters on it instead of hair. "You've got a head like this," says he. "You've got the bump of Adhesiveness well developed. You'll be a man worth something some day, if you don't go and spoil yourself."

"Please, sir," says Robin, brightening as the doctor mentioned the bump, for he had been much puzzled before—"please, sir, it's nothing at all ; but I think I must have done it when I went over the quayside yesterday. I hit my head, I know. My, didn't it hurt!"

The doctor laughed.

"Well, well, sucking babes can't swallow science," he said ; and with that he shut the window and went back to his book.

"Sucking babes !" cried Robin, indignantly, as he scrambled up again beside me. "Whatever does the old chap mean? He might at least

have seen that I was ten years old, after looking so hard at me. I *do* wish that I was a bit bigger, though, Bess," he added with a sigh ; " it's disconvenient to have folks make such mistakes."

After this we served some dozen other customers, without anything special happening particular enough to stay in my memory. Then we drove into this very street and stopped before this same garden door. I mind it well. There was a highish wall in front of the house just as there is now, and the door was of the very same shade of green. It had a brass knocker and bell-pull, shining like gold. But I needn't tell you that, Miss Fanny ; for, though I say it that shouldn't, they did not shine brighter then than now.

Robin got out and rang. We waited a long time without any one coming, then he rang again.

" Mary ! Mary !" called a voice inside—such a sweet voice ; but, as Mary did not answer, there came a patter of feet down the stone path inside, the door was opened, and there stood the sweetest-looking little lady I have ever seen, before or since. She had on a pink print dress, and one of those bonnets we used to call " pokes," from under which her light shiny hair fell on her shoulders. She had eyes like blue forget-me-nots and a skin like apple-blossom ; and as she

stood there, holding a garden-rake in her hand, she made the prettiest picture you ever did see, with the old garden door for a frame, and just a glimpse of flowers about the borders inside, as a set off.

"So it's the milk," she said—"the milk at last. We had to drink our tea without, last night. But what's happened to Mr. Redford, Robin?"

Robin was beginning to tell the story he had already told a dozen times and more that morning, when a window on the ground floor was thrown open, and a lady looked out.

"Well, my dear," she said, "what's the matter?"

"It's the milkman, mother," answered the pretty little girl in the pink frock. "He's got hurt, and Robin was just going to tell me about him. Come in, Robin, and tell mother; I'll see the pony doesn't run off."

So Robin went to the window, pulled his curl to the lady, and began over again; while my pretty little miss stood by the pony, and talked kindly to me. She was about twelve years old at that time, I should suppose, or perhaps a little older; but she was always small and dainty-like, was Miss Liliass. Eh, but she was bonnie, bonnie—like the flower they called her after, as folks said.

"Get the bairns some strawberries, Lily dear," said the lady presently, when Robin had done his story. "Poor John Redford 'll maybe like some, and they can eat the rest themselves."

And then Mary, the little maid, appeared, and while Robin was serving her with the milk, Miss Liliias went to the strawberry-bed, and came back presently with a dozen rich ripe berries in a cabbage-leaf.

"They're all I can find," she said. "Town gardens are not good for growing strawberries." She put the cabbage-leaf on to my knee, and shut the door.

Many's the time I've thought about that morning's visit since, for it was the first time I saw my future mistresses.





CHAPTER IV.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

THE mistress at the farm was so pleased with the way Robin had managed, that she allowed him to go on taking round the milk for the next fortnight ; after which father, having mended a bit, took the reins into his own hands again.

It was not for long, however. Disease of the knee-joint set in, and a constant pain in the injured side soon sent him back to the chimney-corner, and Robin was again forced to fill the gap.

He did his best, poor fellow ! his very best. But, after all, he was only a boy ; and though he could drive the milk-cart, he could not work as father had done during the rest of the day, and the wolf Want came nearer and nearer to the door.

Robin was the only one of John Redford's children who could earn anything, and his earnings were slender indeed where nine mouths were to be fed. Mother did what she could by charring and going out to wash ; but home duties took up much of her time, and though she worked the flesh off her bones to keep us free from debt, she was powerless to stave it off for long.

Things had to be sold. First the old watch which had belonged to John Redford's father ; then all that could be spared of the furniture ; and last of all the pony and cart. This was not done without many a sad discussion, for they were our chief remaining means of livelihood ; but creditors pressed, and they had to go. I shall never forget poor Robin's misery over parting with Polly. I came into the outhouse suddenly when he was feeding her for the last time, the night before she went.

Robin was standing by her with both arms round her shaggy neck, crying as I had never seen him do before, and only once since ; and the pony seemed to understand, for she had left eating her hay and was rubbing her soft nose against him, and making little whinnying sounds of distress. I ran right away, crying too, for I could not bear the sight.

The farm-people were very kind, for they still kept Robin on to take round what milk he could carry on foot, and gave him many a little odd job; but of course another man with cart and horse got most of the custom, and we were worse off than ever.

Parish relief had to be sought, sorely against John Redford's will, for he had always been a man proud of his independence; and about the same time I began to notice the frequent whispered discussions between husband and wife, and the many glances at me. I caught a word or two at times which made me feel uncomfortable, I knew not why—odd sentences such as "They say we've no right to keep her, and our own starving. It'll likely lose us the relief." This from Mrs. Redford. And from John: "Poor little lass! she's like one of our own. It 'ud break her heart to go—ay, and mine too." And so on. My child's heart was very sore. I brooded over what I heard in secret, and presently I began to understand. I was to be sent away.

Yes, that was it. I was not long left in doubt. One afternoon, when everybody was out but father and me and the baby, of whom I had been left in charge, he called me to him, as he sat in the chimney-corner. I went at once, for baby had gone to sleep.

"Little lass," said father, drawing me between his knees, and taking my hands in his, "how old art thou?"

"Eight come next birthday," I answered.

"Old enough to suffer," he said with a sigh—"old enough for that, I doubt; but old enough to trust us too, and not to forget. Eh, little lass?"

"Yes, father," I answered, hardly knowing what to say.

"It's nigh seven year since thou camest to us," went on father, in a soft kind voice—"nigh seven year, and thou'st been a'most like one of our own. We've never given thee cause to doubt our love, little lass, have we?"

"Never, father," I said, and bent down to kiss the hand that held mine.

I felt it tremble, and a drop fell on my hair. I looked up suddenly. John Redford looked as though he were going to cry; but I couldn't believe that, for, childlike, I firmly believed that men never cried.

"And thou wilt not doubt it now?" he went on again, after a long pause. "It seems hard, little lass, but Want is a hard master. They'll let thee see us sometimes, though; and thou won't forget, even——"

"Where am I going, father?" I cried, in great alarm. I guessed, but I *would* not believe.

"To the House, child," he answered shortly.

Then I sobbed and cried, I begged and prayed, clinging to his neck with a child's selfish passion, quite regardless how I wrung the good, true heart of the man who was to me as a father.

"Oh, don't send me away—don't, don't!" I cried wildly. "I *won't* go!"

He let me go on till I was tired, only speaking a soothing word now and then, as to a baby. When I had exhausted myself, and was quiet again, he said wearily—

"There, there, little lass, say no more; I can't bear it. God knows it a'most breaks my heart to send thee from me; but it has to be. We must all learn to say, 'Thy will be done,' little lass. Kneel down by me and say it now; it'll maybe help us both."

He spoke so solemnly, that I knelt down without another word, and said the Lord's Prayer at his knee; and when I came to "Thy will be done," John Redford said it too, but his voice shook, and the tears ran down his wasted cheeks. That quite awed me. I knew then that it *had* to be. John Redford could not help it any more than I myself. And so it was that I was sent to the House.

Mother took me—took me straight away next morning, while Robin was round with the milk,

without even giving us the chance of saying good-bye. I thought it very cruel ; but I believe she did it all for the best, to spare us the pain of a parting scene. I had rather have had it, though, and so I think would Robin.

Mother looked sad too ; and though she did not say anything, I saw her every now and then, as we walked through the streets, lift her apron to her eyes. I think she was crying.

It was a grey, misty morning in November ; a cold drizzling rain was falling, and the streets were wet and muddy. I shivered under my little thin shawl, and mother shivered still more, for *her* shawl was in pawn, and she had nothing over her old cotton gown.

Eh dear, how dreary it all was ! My heart felt like lead. The great workhouse looked like a prison, standing inside a tall brick wall, against which the rain was drifting in a slow, tired way, as if in despair of ever washing off the grime.

Mother rang at the entrance gate, showed the order for my admission, and passed in, with poor little me, clinging sobbing to her skirts. Now that we were really within those terrible walls, my terror and grief had grown so great that the tears almost choked me, and I could not see where we were going. I felt myself go up some stairs, then down, and up some more ; next a door at

the end of a long passage was opened, and there came a great clatter of voices, which were soon hushed to whispers, and then mother and a tall woman had some talk together—about me, doubtless, though I was too far gone to listen.

“Good-bye, child,” said mother presently, stooping down to give me a kiss; “be a good lass, and don’t fret.”

I kissed and clung to her, but she drew herself quickly away, and the door was shut.

“Don’t fret.” It is easy to say; but what was such a child to do? Well, anyhow, I broke mother’s last command, for I crept into the nearest corner, threw my pinafore over my head, and sobbed as though my heart would break.

“Just let her alone; she’ll come to presently,” said the matron; and very soon the chatter went on again, and I was left unheeded. Oh the loneliness of it, the misery of it! Left all alone in that big cold place, without a friend to take me by the hand, without a soul in the house to care whether I cried or not! Folks speak lightly of children’s sorrows, but for my part I think that, though not so lasting as those of older people, there are none which bring such bitterness of despair; for the little hearts are not used to grief, and do not know that sunshine always follows after rain, if we wait long enough for it.



CHAPTER V.

MOTHER SPARROW AND PEA-SOUP.

RAY of sunshine came presently, even to me. "Come, my honey, thou mustn't take on so," said a cheery voice beside me; and, looking up, I saw a little old woman, in the blue linen dress and close white cap of the union, standing before me, leaning on two sticks.

She had bright little beady eyes like a bird's, a hooked nose, and a chin which nearly touched it; but there was something in the face which attracted me, and made me stop crying and look at her half curiously.

"There, then, that's a darlin'," she went on with a beaming smile. "I knew thee wouldn't hurt a poor old body by going on like that all day. See, it's nearly dinner-time. We have pea-soup o' Thursdays, and this is Thursday. It's

real good, honey — well worth sayin' grace for, I can tell thee. Thee likes pea-soup, dearie?"

I looked up with a half-smile. I was really hungry when I came to think about it, and we had had so little but bread to eat of late, and short commons of that, that the vision of pea-soup was not unwelcome. Mother Sparrow (that was her name in the house; Sarah Sparrow was her right name, she told me) beamed still more. "Ay, ay, it's something to look forward to, is a good dinner of pea-soup," she said with relish. "Thee must always look forward to something nice, dearie. It's no use fretting over troubles; it won't mend them one bit. I've had many a trouble in *my* life, but I've always found they don't weigh half so heavy if a body can look forward. Now it's to pea-soup, then it's to visitors' day, whiles it's to Christmas; and after that I take to watching the sun begin to move round every evenin' a little further along the wall, and then I know spring's coming, and I look forward to *that*. There's a many finds life dreary here in the House, but I says to them it won't last for ever; for, thank God, there's a brighter to look forward to at the end—for such as'll do it, dearie. There, I've run out of breath and given myself the cough. Well, never

mind ; a sup o' warm pea-soup always sets *that* right."

She nodded her head kindly to me, and retired to her seat by the fire, wheezing and coughing as she went ; and, a little cheered by her bright words, I began to put her advice into practice, and look forward to pea-soup, whose savoury smell was already coming up from the kitchen. The waiting-time I employed in looking round the big room where mother had left me.

It was plain enough in any case ; not a bit of beauty anywhere ; four bare whitewashed walls without a scrap of colour to warm them ; a floor of bare boards, scoured white also ; beds ranged all round, on some of which poor old bodies lay moaning with the rheumatics ; while such children as were not at school ran up and down the floor, or played without toys under the high windows. Most of the women were seated near the fire, and a miserable-looking lot they were ; there was none I could look at with any pleasure but Mother Sparrow.

Presently a great bell sounded. My old friend—for as such, in a place where I knew no one, I already felt her—rose, nodded to me, and hobbled off on her two sticks, followed by all who could go at all. I rose also, hastened after Mother Sparrow, and went into the big dining-room by

her side. It was not a whit more handsome than was our sitting-room ; but the dinner being the chief object here, one did not weary so much for something pretty, as those inmates who had been used to outdoor life did upstairs. Oh, to have seen a flower sometimes, or a bit of the blue sky which was not smirched with smoke or blocked with roofs ! But I am "looking forward" at the wrong time.

Yes, the pea-soup *was* good. I sat by Mother Sparrow, and we enjoyed it together, with a little friendly glance now and then during the business of supping it up. That *was* a business, as everybody seemed to feel it, for there was little or no conversation at dinner ; mouths and thoughts were all too much taken up by the matter in hand. I believe we had yeasted dumplings after the soup—it was what they often gave us ; but I can't clearly say. It was the pea-soup and Mother Sparrow together that made the impression, you see, and I seldom think of them apart.





CHAPTER VI.

DOWN COALY TYNE.

I GOT used to workhouse life in some degree as time went on. There was a deal of sameness about it, no doubt—going to bed, getting up, school; dinner, where pea-soup always came regularly on Thursdays, and other dishes appeared in a fixed round, turn and turn about; then school again, play in the yards, supper, and to bed. But warmth, food, and clothing were all there. Mother Sparrow continued to be my only friend; many of the others were kind enough, but even among the children I found no other to touch my heart. She touched it—dear, kind, happy old woman, to whom life had shown small brightness, but who yet was content.

She told me her history one day. I should like to tell it to you, Miss Fanny; but I am

giving you my own, and I can't manage the two together. This was the sum of it, however. She had been a servant nearly all her life—for she had gone out as a young girl; married a man, who had long waited for her, when the two had enough to start housekeeping; lost him and her one child through scarlet fever after eighteen months of happiness; then returned to the old service, and only left it when her master, who outlived all his family, was dead.

There was a legacy left her in his will; but she never got it, as no money proved forthcoming after the debts were paid. Then, past work, she was taken in at the House, and there she ended her days. Dark days, you will say, Miss Fanny. But there was nothing dark about Mother Sparrow; she was always looking forward, and would never dwell on the darkest present.

"Honey," she would say constantly—"honey, I can *see* the sun beyond; it's shining now on my man's dear face, and on my Johnny's curls. Sure, the good Lord'll let me reach it some day, and it'll shine on me and all." Missus said, Miss Fanny, that I'd been a good servant to her. Well, if I have been, it's from Mother Sparrow I learnt many of my best lessons, for she'd been a rare one in her day; that wasn't hard to tell.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give

thee a crown of life." That was the text written on the first page of the big, large-print Bible she was so often spelling in, for she was not a good reader ; and she was fond of making me read out that text to her, though she knew it so well by heart. "'A crown of life !'—*there's* something to look forward to, dearie," she would say. "And 'faithful.' Well, it would be strange if we couldn't at least *try* to be that, when such a Master promises it to us."

I've often thought of her words since then, Miss Fanny, and once they were all the anchor I had to lay hold of in the midst of a sea of trouble and doubt. But I'll tell you about that after. I was allowed to go home sometimes—not very often—and I generally returned from those visits with a sore heart.

There was the trouble they were in, for one thing ; father as suffering as ever, but not like to die, as he often wished he could, like poor wee Ruthie, the sickly one of the family, who was rapidly sinking under the privations she endured. She would have been better in the House, I think, only mother would not part with her. Poor mother ! hardships had not improved her temper ; and if the others did not get many kind words from her, how could *I* expect it ?

I never saw Robin when I went home—he was

always out at that hour ; but at times I came upon him in the streets, going or returning on his way round with the milk, and those were bright days for me.

Sometimes, also, as I grew older, the matron would send me out on errands, and more than once I met Robin, and came back later than I should have done in consequence. I remember one time in particular, when I was about ten and he fourteen. It was one of those days which stands out in one's mind from its fellows, like the big beads which marked the tens on the counting-frames we used at school.

It was a Sunday afternoon in spring. The matron had sent me down with a message to one of the houses on the quayside ; and just as I was coming away, who should I see standing by the water's edge, and lazily chucking pebbles into the river, but Robin. I knew him in a moment, though his back was turned and he was a good distance off, and as soon as I set eyes on him I darted up, calling him by his name.

"Robin, Robin ! is that you ?"

"Why, who else ?" he said, turning round such a smiling face as I had not seen him wear for long. "And so it's Bess, is it ? Well, you're the very lass I was wanting to see."

It pleased me mightily to hear him say that,

you may be sure, for I loved Robin better than anybody in the world.

"I've got something to tell you, Bess," he said, the smile trembling roguishly on his pretty mouth, and dancing in his blue eyes. "Now, what d'ye think it is? I'll give you three guesses."

"Something nice?" I asked, half doubtfully, for nice things had not come our way of late.

"Nice? I should just *think* so," he answered. "Come, guess."

"Well, father's better?"

"No." A shade came over the bright face, and he sighed a little. "*That* isn't it, Bess. I wish it were. It's not quite so nice as that. Guess again."

I thought a minute; then, seeing that he was holding something in his hand, which was firmly closed over it, I said—

"Somebody's tipped you?"

He laughed at that—a pleased, bright laugh—and opened his hand. It was full of coppers.

"Well," he answered, "somebody *has* tipped me, sure enough. But that's not the thing—only part of it. Guess again."

"It's nicer than *that*?"

"Yes. Come, I'll just tell you, Baby Bess, for you'll never hit on the right thing. The man

who took father's place to drive round the milk has gone to America, so Farmer Bell has decided to have a pony and cart of his own for the business in future, and——"

"But that's nothing!" I broke in with disappointment.

"Stop a bit, Baby Bess," says Robin to that. "And, as I was saying, he's hired a lad to drive, and that lad's *me*."

"You? Oh, Robin!"

It was such delightful news, that it quite took away my breath.

"Yes," says Robin, proudly. "It's me. And I'm to work on the farm between times, as father used to do; and with what he gets from the parish, my wages 'll make them pretty comfortable at home. What's more, Bess, the farmer's bought the very pony we used to drive."

"Polly?"

"Yes—Polly. She knew me, Bess. She whinnied to me, quite pleased. Think of that! And she's looking real bonny, the canny little thing. Eh, but it'll be nice to drive her again! Aren't you pleased, lass?"

His eyes were sparkling with satisfaction, but his joy was not quite complete till I had answered to it.

My Robin, how bonny he looked, standing

there with the sun on his curls, and his face beaming all over like the sun-sparkles on the water below! His pleasure was more to me than my own.

"He paid me my arles* last night, when he took me on," continued the boy, "and the missus said I was a good lad, and gave me these coppers to spend for myself. My, isn't it a sight of money! I never had so much of my own before. Father's taken the arles, but he won't touch a penny of this. I was looking at it when you came up, Bess, and wondering whether a trip down the river wouldn't be nice. I *do* love boats, and I've never seen the sea; only I wanted *you*, lass. See, there's a boat going down now; I'll see if they'll take us."

It was a keel, laden with coals for Tynemouth; and the men on board readily agreed to take us there and back for Robin's coppers. So in we jumped, never minding the grime, though my blue linen frock was none the better for it, as I sat by Robin's side at the prow, watching the ripples splash against the side of our clumsy boat, while we dropped down coaly Tyne.

* Earnest-money, paid on conclusion of a bargain or engagement in the North.



CHAPTER VII.

"WEEL MAY THE KEEL ROW."

"Weel may the keel row, the keel row, the keel row ;
Weel may the keel row that my laddie's in.
He wears a blue bonnet, a bonnet, a bonnet ;
He wears a blue bonnet, and a dimple in his chin."



O sang one of the grimy boatmen,
with the true Newcastle humour,
rolling out the *r*'s as we all do here,
Miss Fanny. (It's homelike to mē,
though I've often heard you laugh at it, honey.)
And all the time he sang he was looking at
Robin and me, with a twinkle in the eye which
shone under his bushy grey brows.

The words suited Robin well enough, to be
sure ; for he had a rare dimple in his chin, and he
wore a blue bonnet, too. Blue, indeed, it had
once been, though it had a faded look now, and
matched his clothes, which were more like a
patched quilt than anything. But the lad was

so bright and bonny, that few thought to look at them.

"Are ye brother and sister, bairns?" asked the man kindly, when he had done singing.

"No," says Robin, colouring up at the notice of his dimple; for he was often chaffed about that, and he did not quite like it.

"No? Well, maybe the bonny little lass there'll sing ye the rest some day, laddie, when she gets out of the House," went on the man, and then turned away to attend to his boat.

"Bonny!" I had never been called that before, and the word caught my attention, though I did not believe I deserved it. I looked at Robin to see what he was thinking of, and, to my surprise, I saw he was red as a turkeycock.

"What did he mean, Robin?" I asked, for he looked so angry, that I thought the man must have meant something rude.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Robin. "Bess," he went on presently, "you'd not stay in the House if *I* could help it; but mother says we'll still be poor enough, in spite of my wages, and——"

He looked away, and his voice trembled.

"Never mind, Robin dear," I said eagerly; "it's not so bad in the House as you think, and

I'll be able to get my own bread some day. I'm growing a big strong lass, ain't I, Robin?"

He looked at me and sighed.

"We don't like you being there, father and I," he said shortly.

I looked down at my workhouse dress. Could it be that he was ashamed of being seen with a little union girl? The thought flashed on me suddenly, sending a pain through my heart and bringing the tears to my eyes. But I wronged Robin: he was not thinking of any such thing, and of that his next words made me sure.

"Bess," he said, "you won't think us unkind, will you? Mother says you must stay where you are for the present, though it was of getting you out I thought first when Farmer Bell took me on; and that's true, Bess. Father says, though, that you're to come home whenever they'll let you have a holiday; and I shall always look out for you, little lass, when I'm driving round the cart, and I'll give you a ride whenever you like; for you're just like my own sister, you know, though you don't live with us now. Why, you're crying!"

I was, but it was not, as he thought, for sorrow at being left in the House, but because it touched me so to find how I was still cared for in the old home, and especially by Robin.

I told him as much, and that and my tears together made him change the subject very quickly ; for, boylike, emotion and tears were not at all to his mind.

He began to draw my attention to the scenes we were passing through, as our black barge moved slowly down the river.

"Coaly Tyne" it looked indeed at that part. The banks were black with coal-wharves and smoking factories, and lined with ship-building yards, where skeleton vessels stood on the stocks, looking as though the workmen had left them to shiver in their bones while they went for their Sunday holiday. The very water looked inky, as it rippled past the sides of our vessel. And yet how intensely I enjoyed it all ; for the spring sun was bright overhead, my heart felt sunny with Robin's good news and Robin's presence, and I was having a jaunt for the first time since I went into the House. I did not trouble myself in the least as to the welcome which might await me when I returned.

Being Sunday, there was less traffic going on in the river than usual ; but still there were enough of ships dropping down on their seaward way, and of others coming in, with their national colours flying from the masthead, to make the scene a tolerably lively one.

Our keel-lads called out many a welcome and farewell in broad Newcastle to those of the crews who were known to them, and had many a hearty word thrown back at them in return.

Presently the faint smell of seaweed and salt water came to us on the breeze; gulls began to hover overhead; the banks went further apart; and Robin, looking forward with keen and eager glance, said—

“Bess, we shall soon see it now. How will it look, d’ye think?”

I could not answer him, for who that has never seen the sea can have any notion of it? But I too looked eagerly forward.

We sat there close together, the sea-breeze blowing back the hair from our faces, bringing a glow into our cheeks, and making our hearts dance with expectation. We saw the banks rise higher, that on the left ending in a bold cliff, on which a broken ruin, with a tall and slender window, rose against a sky of softest blue—not smoky here, but of such lovely clearness that I can think of nothing like it but the blue stones in my old missus’s ring, Miss Lilius’ bonny eyes, or perhaps the blue forget-me-nots which grew by the stream on Farmer Bell’s farm. There were queer little old-fashioned houses with red-tiled roofs built here and there upon the

cliffs; a white lighthouse for the seafaring folks looking out over the water; brown rocks with dark seaweed upon them rising in masses here and there; and beyond—oh, Miss Fanny, shall I ever forget it?—the great, blue, wide-stretching sea, with its white-capped, leaping waves, and its faraway sparkle touching the very sky; dark-blue water and light-blue air seeming just to melt into each other. What I felt then I can't tell you; it just took away my breath too much. But, Miss Fanny, I've thought since that it's just the grandest thing I ever saw on earth.

I looked at Robin presently to see how *he* was feeling it; and if the sky had looked like Miss Liliass' eyes, the sea, I thought, just matched his, for they were the very colour, and at that moment had just the same dance and sparkle, and wide, large, faraway look in them.

I asked him what he thought, but he just couldn't say a word at first, but looked at me with his lips apart, as though I had waked him from a dream, and then turned back again to the sea.

"It's just *grand*, Bess," he said at last, and the few words meant a deal.

The keel landed us presently, and we spent a long time wandering about, scrambling over rocks, gathering seaweeds, and paddling in the

clear, bright pools. The hours slipped by, fast and silently as the little waves which came breaking higher and higher upon the beach.

At last a clock, striking in the town above, warned me that I had been five hours away from the House.

"Robin," I cried in a fright, "it's six o'clock! Oh, what will they say when I get back?"

"Never mind," says Robin; "we've had a jolly day. Come, though; it's time we were going."

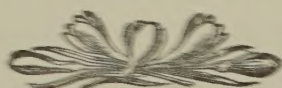
It took us a long time to find another boat, for our keel was gone; it cost us many an intreaty to be taken on board (for the coppers were there no longer); it took us almost double the time to go up-stream that it had taken to come down; and by the time we reached Newcastle, the light had died from the sky, and other lights were glimmering instead in the houses; and my heart, which had been so light, was heavy with fear.

Well, Miss Fanny, a stolen holiday costs something, you see, and I had to pay the price.

Robin walked with me back to the workhouse door, rang the bell, and said to the porter who let me in, "Please, sir, don't scold her; it was all my fault."

He said it so sweetly, that I think if the matron had heard him she would have forgiven

me. But she did not. I was made to tell the whole story; had to hear hard things of Robin in the course of a rating, which I suppose I deserved; was threatened that I should be "reported" if I ever so transgressed again; and, what I felt most of all, was not allowed to stir outside the walls again for many a long day.





CHAPTER VIII.

OUR SUNDAY VISITOR.

THAT next year was a dreary one ; but, about the Easter following, a day came which was the beginning of a very different life for me.

It was a wet Sunday afternoon. I mind that well, for we children were all indoors ; and, as games requiring much movement were not allowed to us on Sundays, nor even on week-days in the common ward, we were all sitting in front of the largest window, watching the rain-drops which streamed down the glass, and making them "run races," as we called it ; that is, guessing which would get to the bottom first.

We were growing tired of it, however, and consequently dull, as we had nothing else to do, when suddenly the door opened. We looked round.

"Here's a lady come to see you," said the matron ; and there on the threshold stood a young thing of about eighteen or nineteen, looking as though she had come into our dull, ugly, hard-featured union-world by mistake, for she certainly had been reared amidst sunshine and flowers ; you could tell that, only to look at her. She had on a flowered gown of some chintz stuff, a little black silk scarf about her shoulders, the daintiest bonnet you ever did see, and under it a face which reminded one of nothing less fair and rosy and sweet than a cluster of apple-blossom. She had a big nosegay in her hand—primroses, violets, and red and yellow wallflowers, smelling like a garden in spring.

"I've come to see you," says she, coming forward into the room half-shyly, with a rosier colour rising in her fair face. Every head was turned that way—of that you may be very sure ; the eyes of all the children devoured her ; the white caps of the old women were all a-quiver with excitement. Never had such a bright creature come into our dull ward before. Nobody spoke at first. The pretty creature seemed taken aback. She stopped half-way across the floor, not knowing what to do ; and we didn't help her, we only stared.

"God bless you, my dear, ye're kindly welcome,"

said Mother Sparrow, coming to the rescue. She had been nodding in her chair, and had only just awakened. Then our pretty visitor smiled, came forward, and sat down by the old body, with all her embarrassment gone.

They talked of this and that and the other, the old body and the bright young thing, as friendly as may be; and we all listened and looked, and looked and listened, quite forgetting the rain.

"I thought you'd maybe find your Sunday afternoons a little dull, and would like a Sunday visitor now and then," said the lady presently, with a pretty look of apology all round. "They said I might come again if you'd let me. May I?"

We all wanted to say "yes;" but Mother Sparrow was our spokeswoman, and we left it to her to answer.

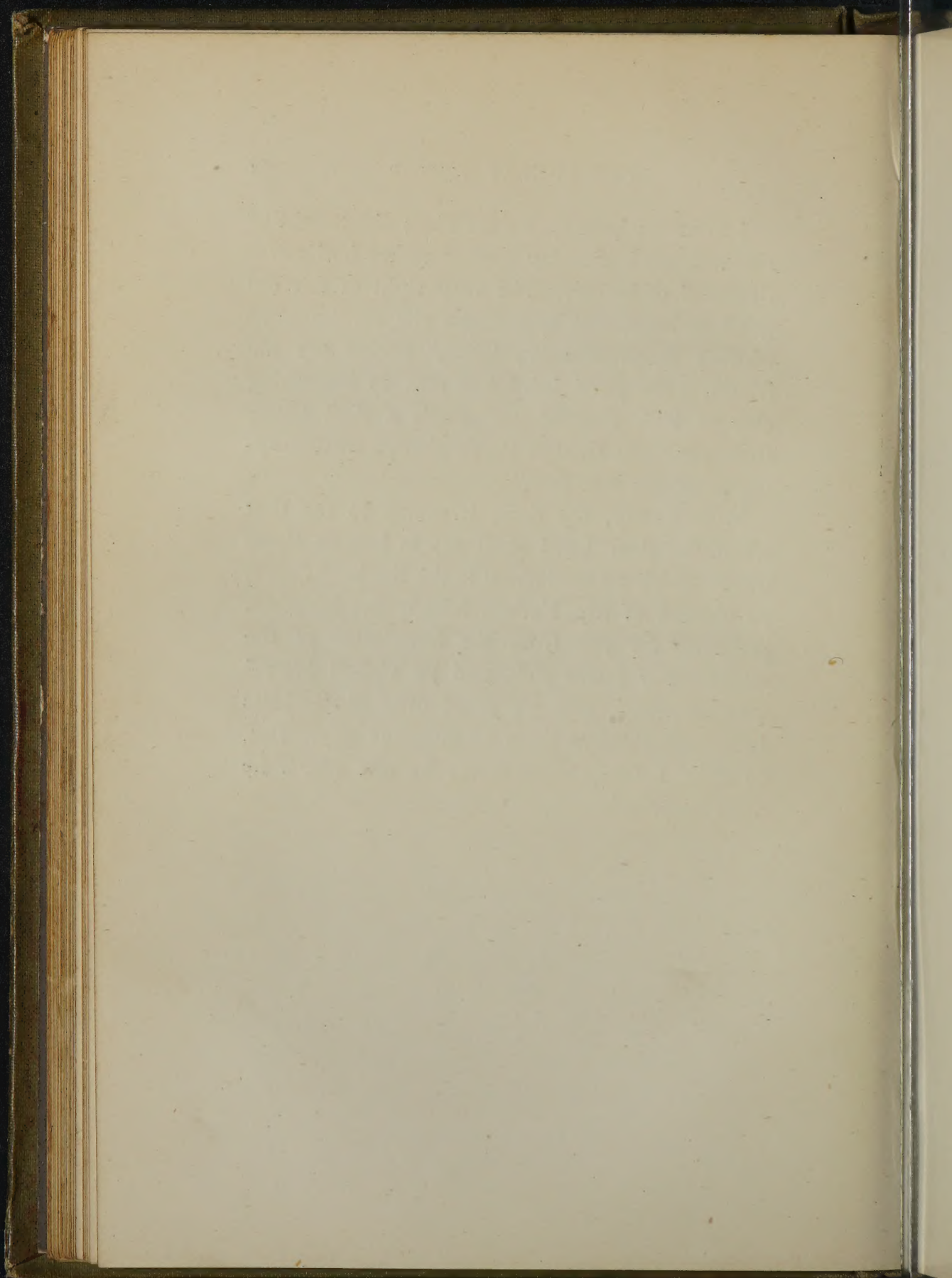
"*May* you, my dear?" she said. "Ay, that you may; and you'll be as welcome as the sunshine, that you will."

So our Sunday visitor came again and again, and I soon knew and watched for her as Miss Lilius Johnson—the very same little lady who had given us the strawberries from her mother's garden on that summer morning when Robin first drove the milk-cart. She had ever a kind word for us all. She read from the Bible to the

old women whose eyes were dim ; she taught us children such Sunday lessons as we had never dreamed of before. The very sight of her did good to heart and eye—"like the sunshine," as Mother Sparrow said ; "and," added my old friend, "the good Lord has sent us something else to look forward to. She's a deal better than pea-soup, though that's always worth saying grace for, it is that."

Miss Fanny, my dear, it seems to me that when the dear Lord shall say in heaven those words which we read about in the Book—"Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was sick, and ye visited Me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me"—Miss Liliás will deserve them as much as any. But, eh dear, I fancy there'll not be one who'll be more surprised.







PART II.
YOUTH.



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CHAPTER I.

GOOD ENOUGH ?



WAS nigh fourteen years old, when one day, just as our Sunday visitor was leaving the room, I heard her say to the matron in the passage outside—

“Mrs. Wardroper, my mother wishes me to ask you whether you have any strong girl in the House whom you can recommend to her as a little under-servant. I need not say that she must be a *good* girl.”

I listened intently for the answer, for I knew that the guardians were thinking of sending me out to service, and to think of being with Miss Liliass was a happiness which made my heart beat and the colour rush to my cheeks. But the matron hastened to close the door, and I heard nothing. All that night I could scarcely

sleep for thinking. *Was* I a good girl? I was a strong one, I knew—about the strongest in the House—but *good*?

I had tried to be good—how hard I cannot tell you—since Miss Liliás came to teach us. I had never required speaking to for lingering on errands since then, and I had done my best to work as well behind the matron's back as before her face. But she was not one to praise us, and I scarcely knew how I stood with her.

Was I good enough to be chosen for Miss Liliás' servant?

I could not answer that question, think as I would; and while I was still thinking, I fell fast asleep at last. But I could not rest, from the subject that was troubling my head. I had a dream, and in my dream I was still awaiting judgment; not the matron's or Miss Liliás' decision, though, but God's. I stood before Him trembling. Was I a good girl—good enough to be chosen for heaven? That was the question now.

Never, if I live to be a hundred, shall I forget the awfulness of it. I suffered agonies of anxiety—such agonies that I could not sleep through them—and just as the decree was about to be given, I awoke.

The dawn was just beginning to shine in at

the little window above my head, touching with grey, cold light the rows of sleeping faces down each side of the room. All these would have to be judged some day ! The cold dews had broken out upon my forehead. I sat up in bed and clasped my hands ; but I could not pray. Presently, as I sat there trembling, the growing light fell upon a picture which Miss Lillas had brought and fastened up on the opposite wall. It represented our Lord bearing His cross, and underneath were the words, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." While above, in letters of gold which glimmered in the early light, stood the text, "The Lord our Righteousness."

I had seen the picture and the words many a time before, but never till then did they come home to me.

In a sudden flash, I saw what I was and what I needed ; and I slid from my bed, and kneeling down, prayed that He would take away my sins and make me good enough to be chosen, not only by Miss Lillas, but by the Lord Himself when the time should come. Then I lay down again, and I slept without a dream till getting-up time. Well, next day, my heart still beat a little whenever the door opened ; but I did my work and learnt my lessons as quietly as usual,

and then, after dinner, sat down to sew with the elder girls.

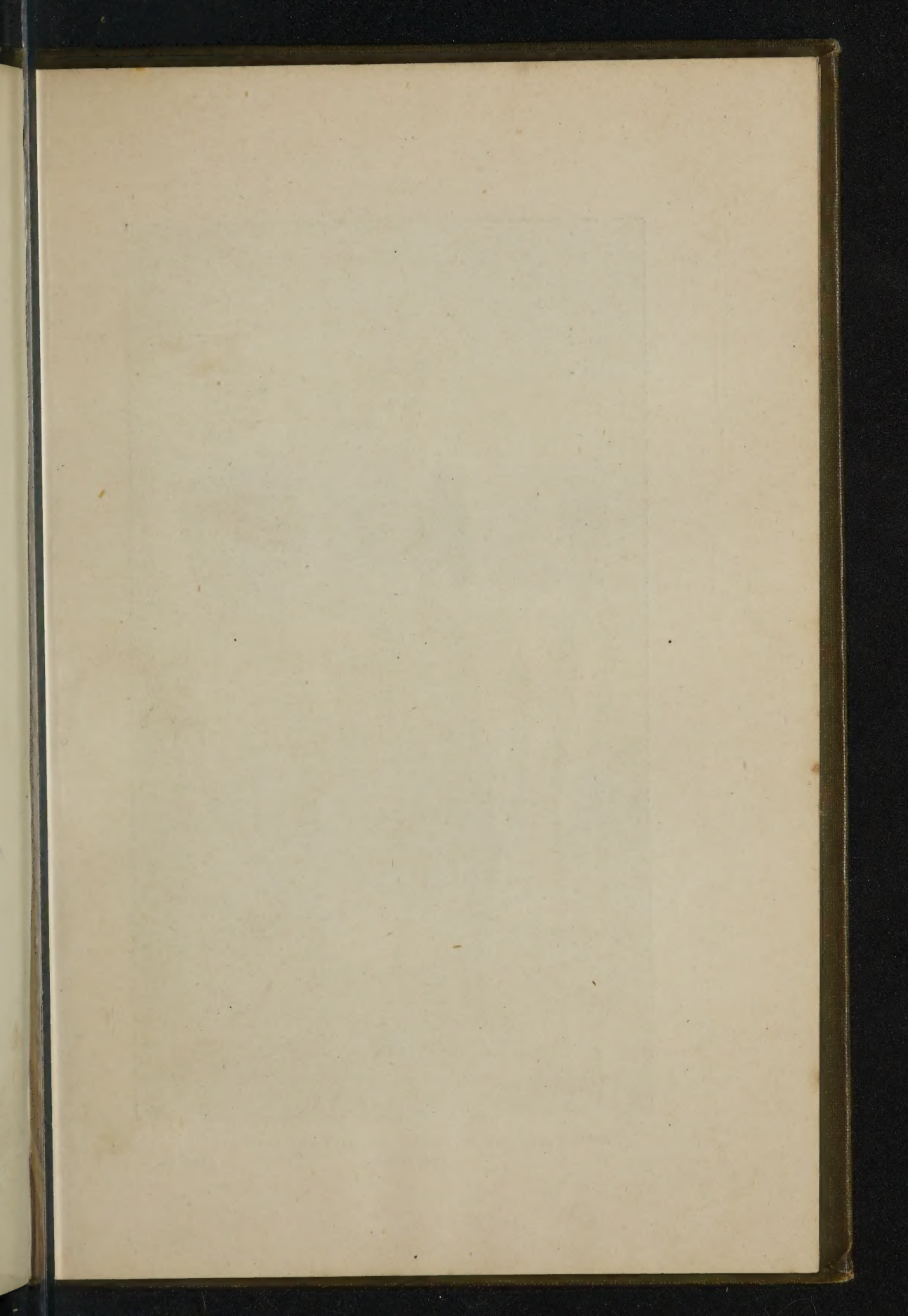
We had sat maybe half an hour, when again the door opened, and this time the matron and Miss Liliás really appeared. "The time's come," said I to myself, and I turned hot and cold, and hot again, and pricked my finger because I could not hold the needle steady. However, I said a little prayer quite low, and then got up and curtsied with the rest; for Miss Liliás had come all the way up the long room, and was standing in front of us.

"You asked me to recommend you a little servant, ma'am," said Mrs. Wardroper, in her slow, even voice. "You said she was to be not only a strong, but a good girl. Well, then, I think Elizabeth Ellis here will suit you. She looks strong enough for what you want, doesn't she, ma'am?"

Miss Liliás smiled kindly.

"Yes, quite strong enough, Mrs. Wardroper," she said. "And is she a good girl too?"

Mrs. Wardroper paused an instant, and then I knew that the moment I had dreaded was come. I turned so faint that I could scarcely stand, and when at last the matron began to speak, the blood rang so in my ears that I heard her as if from a long way off.





"WE'VE NEVER HAD TO PUNISH HER SINCE SHE CAME INTO
THE HOUSE."

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"I'm not one to praise the girls to their faces, ma'am," she answered, "that's not my way as a usual thing. But since you ask before the child, I'll just say this: we've never had to punish her since she came into the House, and it's few indeed we can say as much for. Remember that, girls," she added, turning to my companions.

How I blushed! How happy I felt! I scarcely understood what Miss Lillas replied, or what she said about me entering on my duties in her mother's house when the consent of the guardians had been obtained, which Mrs. Wardroper had no doubt would be given the next day, when the Board sat.

"Oh, Mother Sparrow, isn't it good? Shall I not be happy?" I cried, squeezing my old friend's hand as soon as I could go to her.

"Ay, child," she answered, more slowly than usual; "but I shall miss you."

"But I'll come and see you—I will indeed—and I'll have such lots to tell. Oh, shan't I just be happy!" I said again, for my heart felt running over with joy.

"I trust you may, child," said my old friend. "But, Bessie honey, service is not all sunshine. *He* didn't find it so, and can *we* expect it? But just you remember, honey, that *He* came as a

servant too, and set Him for your copy. Service is a grand thing if we look on it like that. And remember it's not eye-service that will do for Him. Just read me the bit verse in my Bible, dearie, and then I think I'll go to bed. God bless the child and make her faithful, so that she may not miss her crown! There'll always be that to look forward to, lassie, whatever comes; only don't forget—don't forget."





CHAPTER II.

FAIRYLAND.



FEW days after that, I said good-bye to the workhouse and its inmates and went out to earn my own bread in the world. I was to go straight to Mrs. Johnson's, for Miss Liliast had fixed the hour and arranged to send up for my box in the evening; so I had no opportunity of running to the old home on my way, and telling them where I was gone to. This was the only shade on my joy, for I did not like to think they did not know where I was. "But it'll not be for long," thought I, "for likely enough Robin still calls with the milk."

It was a lovely day, but my heart felt as bright as the sunshine, and only began to tremble a little as I rang the bell at the well-remembered green door in the garden wall.

What a sweet smell came from the garden! I had to wait a few minutes, and had time to feast my eyes on the thorn-bushes, white and rosy with may, which looked over the wall and shed their blossoms into the street outside. It must be fairyland inside, I thought, and I was going to be let in. How wonderful it was!

While I was still thinking this, the door opened, and an elderly woman, in lilac print dress and white cap and apron, appeared. She looked very prim and neat; not much like a fairy, certainly.

"So you are the new girl, I suppose?" she said. "Well, step in. Missus and Miss Lily are out; but there are the dinner things to wash up, and I can show you how."

I thought to myself, "I know how;" but I did not say so, and followed her in, down the neat front passage to the kitchen—the very same where we are now, Miss Fanny. The sun was shining in through the little window looking into the garden, which stood wide open, so that I could smell the flowers and hear the bees humming outside. The door into the tiny back yard stood open too, and the sun was there as well. The sun was shining on the rows of bright tins against the wall, and making the low fire look white and drowsy; in fact, he seemed

to be having it all his own way in that little house.

"Now hang up your bonnet, child, and come here," said Bridget, or *Mrs.* Bridget, as she particularly told me to call her. "You see these dinner-plates? Well, I'll wash them up at the sink, and do you dry them."

I began doing as I had been taught to do with the piles of plates at the House—drying them with a touch, as they came out of the hot water, and then piling them up beside me. But *Mrs.* Bridget stopped me very soon.

"No, child," she said, "*that* won't do. Here, look at me."

She took the plate out of my hands, wiped it carefully, laid it down; did the same to the next, and then took my whole pile to pieces.

"Look," she said, "they're all over steam! That comes of half-drying them when they're hot, and piling them all together. Here, set them all down one by one as you dry them, and let the heat get off them before you put them away. Slap-dash and piles may do in the House, where there are piles to do; but we're more particular here, as you'll find."

Somehow the sun did not look quite so bright after this. *Mrs.* Bridget had made me feel mortified and out of heart; for I had thought

myself half a servant already, and I found I was nothing of one in *her* eyes. However, the dinner things were soon sided up;* for though there had been company with the missus that day, there were none so many plates used after all, and the work was light after the washings-up I was used to at the House.

Next she made me do up the fire; or, rather, she did it, and made me watch her. What a time she seemed to take! Such clearing out of ashes, such polishing of irons, as I had never seen before. I was trembling with impatience before that kitchen was cleared for the afternoon.

"Now," she said, "we'll go to the parlour; missus and Miss Lily'll be in at five, and tea must be laid for them. Parlour tea'll be *your* work in future, so mind you pay attention."

We went into the parlour, and eh dear! I thought I had never seen anything so pretty as that room. It was blue at that time—blue paper, blue covers to the chairs, blue-and-white carpet on the floor. There was a great blue china bowl on the round table by the window, full of moss and wild hyacinths, and by this stood the ladies' white work-baskets, also lined with blue. There were pictures all about the walls, just as now, and in the brightly polished

* Put in order.

grate burned the least little bit of a fire : missus liked one all the year round, Mrs. Bridget told me.

She showed me how to set the tea-table with the blue-and-white china, kept in the little oak cupboard by the fire, and then she left me to sweep up the grate ; "for," she said, hearing the sound of wheels stopping at the gate, "there's the milk coming ; I must go and take it in."

The milk coming ! Then Robin must be coming too ! I put down the shovel and brush which I held in a great hurry on the hearthrug, and was going to rush to the door, when Mrs. Bridget stopped and stared at me.

"Why, child," she said, "where are you going ? Didn't you hear me tell you to do up the fire ? And to put your shovel on the hearthrug, too ! There, turn it up as I showed you, and lay down your hearth-cloth to save the carpet. Now then, mind what you're about, and see all's neat by I come back."

She shut the door, and I stood stock-still with the tears in my eyes. Robin to be so near and I not able to speak to him ! It seemed too dreadful. But there was no help for it ; so, with my breast heaving a good deal, I laid down my hearth-cloth and began doing up the fire, as Mrs. Bridget had shown me how in the kitchen ; and

I took even a longer time over it than she had done, for my eyes were half-blinded with tears, and yet I was so anxious to do it well.

Before I had quite finished, the door opened. I thought it was Mrs. Bridget, and did not turn my head. Some one began to speak. With a great start, I recognized Miss Liliás' voice, and spilled half the ashes out of my shovel over the clean hearth.

"And so it's little Bessie," Miss Liliás was saying; but, seeing my accident, she added kindly, "Never mind; we'll let you finish first. There, go on; that's a good girl.—Mother, where shall we put all these flowers?"

So the missus was there too!

I went on with my work, all a-tremble; for I felt as though they were both watching me. That was quite a mistake, however, as I found when I got up; for both ladies had gone into another room which opened from the parlour, and were giving all their attention to arranging some flowers. How conceited folks are, to be sure, Miss Fanny, 'specially young folk; for, if they only knew it, other folks seldom trouble their heads half so much about them as they suppose. The world has too much to do, to be always watching its neighbour.

Well, I went back to the kitchen, and Mrs.

Bridget carried in the tea while I washed my hands ; after which she and I sat down to our own meal together, during which she talked so much about my duties that I could scarcely eat for listening, and felt morally certain I should never remember them all.

After tea I was sent for to the parlour. Miss Liliás and the mistress were both there, sitting by the window with their pretty blue work-baskets before them. Miss Liliás looked up with a kind smile, but it was the mistress who had sent for me, and I had to give my attention to her.

She was still a youngish lady at that time, and very pretty and sweet she looked in her black silk gown and white lace cap. She was very pale—she never had very good health, you know—but her skin looked as soft as satin, and her hair and eyes were of the loveliest brown. She was tall and slight, and had very soft, gentle ways of speaking and moving ; and yet you could see she was the mistress all the time.

She did not say much just then ; but her few gentle words gave me a much better idea of what was expected of me than all Mrs. Bridget's talk.

Dear, kind mistress ! I seem to hear her voice

yet, though she's gone where she'll not need a servant any more. Eh, Miss Fanny, it was a pleasure and a pride to wait on such as she; it seemed all one with serving the Master Himself; for wasn't she always busy among His poor, and, by doing her little jobs, didn't I set her more free to give herself to His business? Anyhow, it was the work He had set me to do; and that's how it seems to me, Miss Fanny.

We had prayers at nine o'clock, and then they sent me to bed in a little closet-room with white dimity hangings, and a dormer-window in the roof. Such a bonny white nest I thought it, after our big dingy ward at the House.

Well, it was so beautiful and white, it seemed quite a shame to get into bed and crush the pillows! So I thought; but I did not think it long, for I was soon as sound asleep as any top.





CHAPTER III.

HELPING ROBIN.

MRS. BRIDGET was an early riser. In summer she was always down by half-past five ; but I did not mind this, for I was used to early hours at the House. She slept next-door to me, and I jumped up the minute she knocked through the wall, and was dressed as soon as she.

We went through the morning's work together, she showing me a deal of things ; for she was a real good servant, was Mrs. Bridget, though her ways were not of the pleasantest.

When seven o'clock had struck I began to grow fidgety, for I thought, Robin 'll soon be coming now. I had it on my lips many a time to ask Mrs. Bridget if I might open the door for him, but I dared not ; and when at last the bell rang, my heart was in my mouth in a

minute, for I feared to miss him again. But Mrs. Bridget was on her knees, washing the parlour hearth, and says she, "Go to the door, Elizabeth, and take in the milk."

How glad I felt! I flew down the passage, and out in a minute; and there, sure enough, was Robin, standing with his back to me, busy with the cart. Polly, grown rather grey by this time, was waiting as quiet as could be, and I waited too, willing to give Robin a surprise. And a surprise he got.

"Bessie!" says he, turning round, and starting so that the tins in his hands clattered together.

"Yes, sir," says I, quite demure, dropping a curtsy.

"How did you get here, lass? Where did you come from? Have they hired you? When did you come? Why didn't you tell us?" says Robin again, still quite astonished, as I could see.

"One at once, sir," says I, the same as before; though I felt inclined to laugh and cry for joy at seeing the bonny lad again.

"Bessie, Mrs. Johnson's never hired you for a servant, has she?" asked Robin, so eagerly that there was nothing for it but to give up chaffing and tell him all about it. "I'm real glad," he said, when I had finished, giving my

hand a big grip, "and so will they be at home. It's a fine thing for you, lass."

"Elizabeth! Why, whatever's got the girl?" came in Mrs. Bridget's voice, like a stone thrown sharp into the account Robin was giving me of all at home.

I started, and said I must go.

Robin smiled. "Well, get leave to come and see us all, Bess," he said. "And don't you be too scared at Mrs. Bridget; she's——"

He stopped short, for there stood the good woman herself, looking mighty black.

"What's this?" she said. "Does anything ail the milk this morning?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Bridget, ma'am," answered Robin, quite quietly. "I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting;" and he gave us the milk in a trice.

"Well," says Mrs. Bridget, when he was gone, "you're beginning early, you are—wasting your time with the milkman already! Girls were different in *my* young days."

I did not know what she meant, but I was very frightened.

"It's only Robin," I said, quite low.

"Only Robin! *Well——*" She shut her lips with a smack. "Only Robin!" she repeated, after a minute; "and how do you come

to know *him*? There, never mind, I haven't time to hear now; only, mind, don't talk to no Robins again, or the mistress shall hear of it. A child like you, indeed!"

She flounced away into the parlour, and I began to cry, like a child as I was indeed. We had breakfast together soon after, and she never said a word all the time, yet I think she was expecting me to tell her about Robin. I know now that I had better have done it, for there is nothing for a young servant like being perfectly open with those in authority over her; and if Mrs. Bridget had known who Robin really was, she might have seen things differently.

But she had checked my confidence by her haste, and her harshness did not tempt me to renew it. I felt both vexed and sad, and ate my breakfast as silently as she did.

After this, though Robin came daily, morning and evening, Mrs. Bridget did not give us the chance of exchanging a word much oftener than when I was in the House.

The mistress willingly gave me leave to go home on Sunday afternoon; indeed, Sunday was really a day of rest for Bridget and me. Mistress was very particular about our going to church, and always had most of the cooking done the day before, that we might manage it.

So Mrs. Bridget and I took turns—she staying at home to mind the house and boil the potatoes one Sunday morning, and I the next; and whichever was not out in the morning had leave in the afternoon. In this way I got home regularly twice a month, and went to church with Robin and the rest after we'd had our tea with father. Poor father, how he seemed to enjoy those Sunday afternoons when we were all about him! It was like the old days come back again, he said. And, indeed, Robin contrived to keep them in tolerable comfort, with what the parish allowed; though with father always bad, and little Ruthie in a decline, and the twins too idle and wild to help much, there was nothing to spare. I looked forward to my first quarter's wages, to give them a little help; and when I took in the bright sovereign and put it into father's hand, and I heard him bless me in a trembling voice, and saw Robin's shining eyes, wasn't I happy! I never got half the pleasure out of my wages, when they had to go on my own clothes.

"Bess," said Robin, as he walked part of the way home with me that evening—"Bess, you're a good girl, and it was a good day for us all when we found you. And now you're helping me to keep father and the rest, I——"

"Oh, Robin, I *like* to help—you know I do!" exclaimed I, not knowing where to look; for what was my sovereign, after all, seeing I owed them my very life?

"Yes," said Robin, smiling, "I like to think we're working together for them, Bessie. I know you like to help, lass; but I'm none the less pleased."

How good he was to put it like that! "Working together!" Yes, it was nice to think of that. And such pleasant service as it was, too, working for such mistresses as mine. I went to bed that Sunday night feeling as if not even Mrs. Bridget and all her worries could spoil the goodness of the lot which had fallen to me.





CHAPTER IV.

MECHLIN LACE AND AZALEAS.

AS time went on, however, I had to learn the truth of Mother Sparrow's words, that "service is not all sunshine." Mrs. Bridget, capital servant as she undoubtedly was, "had a temper," as folks say ; and though I tried to learn my work, and do it as well as I could, I heard more blame than praise from her lips. Young servants are tiresome, Miss Fanny, I won't deny it, and I dare say I often tried Mrs. Bridget by forgetfulness and carelessness, just as we children had tried mother at home. I try to think of that now, and not to remember her with dislike ; but not the less is it true that I often had to suffer from her. Well, well, I dare say it was good for me. As I heard by chance, she had not wanted to have a girl under her, saying that

"girls are more bother than they are worth ;" and I think she rather liked to show the truth of her words. She was especially suspicious of my acquaintance with Robin ; and though both he and I were very careful not to offend her, she made a point of taking in the milk whenever she could, so that I might not waste my time "chattering to that idle milkman," as she put it.

I had been with the mistress five years, however, before my great trouble came.

I call it "great," Miss Fanny, for so I thought it then ; though, set beside the troubles of after-life, it seems but a small one indeed. However, I was but a chit of a girl then, and I suffered very keenly.

Miss Liliass was very kind in giving me some of her cast-off clothes now and then, knowing that the family that had brought me up were in poor circumstances, and that I liked to save what I could of my wages to help them. One day, as I was ironing her muslins, she came in, commended me for the way in which I was doing them, and looking at one of her lace sets of collar and cuffs, which was a little out of fashion, said I might have it.

I was delighted. But Robin told me that day that the doctor had ordered wine for father, and

that he was at his wits' end how to get it. I thought of my lace set; and as I knew a place where these things were bought second-hand, I asked Robin to try and sell it for me, and take the wine to father, with my love.

Robin had taken the lace out of the parcel, and was holding it in his hand looking at it, when Mrs. Bridget came to the front door.

"The bell's rung, Elizabeth," she said, very shortly, and went in again, I hurrying after.

The next day I had some more ironing to do, for some of the things had wanted extra bleaching, and had been left out a second night on the little grass plot at the side of the house.

When I had finished, Mrs. Bridget came to look over the things before putting them away in the mistress's and Miss Lily's drawers, which was what she always liked to do herself.

"What's got missus's best lace cap?" she asked sharply.

"I don't know," answered I. "I never saw it. Was it there when you washed the things, Mrs. Bridget?"

"Did I wash it? Why, of course I did, and carefully too, for it's valuable lace—real Mechlin it is. And you're sure you didn't iron it?"

I felt frightened at the mention of valuable lace, for I had scorched one of the mistress's caps

a little, and I hastened to look at them again. But no; the scorched one was but a common one. The Mechlin lace was not there.

"What can have got it?" I said helplessly, with the glow of alarm still on my face. "It's not there now, for certain."

"No, it isn't," answered Mrs. Bridget, sharply; "and what's got it is best known to you, I should think. 'Twas you that put them out to bleach. They were in *your* charge, you know, so you're bound to account for them. Now, just please to reflect: could it have been missus's cap you were showing off to the milkman last night, d'ye think?"

I felt indignant at her tone.

"No, it wasn't," I answered hastily. "What makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing particular; only folks have eyes, my girl. Will you just find that cap before this time to-morrow, or I'll have to speak to the missus."

Miss Fanny, you may fancy how I felt. Mrs. Bridget's suspicions were plain enough. I might have explained, but I was afraid of unbelief, and my pride was all in arms. I went straight out into the garden to search for the missing cap; but it was growing dusk, and the hot tears, which fell from my eyes unto the grass, as I

stooped over it to look, made everything seem dim and misty. I was forced to give it up till next day, and go in again; but Mrs. Bridget's looks were hard to bear, and when we went in to prayers, and missus wished us a kind good night, as was her custom before we went to bed, it was all I could do to keep from bursting out crying.

Well, I had no time to look next morning before breakfast, and all day long I could only go at intervals, so that Robin had twice been and seen me with red eyes and heart uncomforted.

"What ails you, lassie?" he asked, when I took in the evening's milk. "Now, don't you take on, for I've got enough wine to start father, anyhow. I sold your lace, and that helped. You——"

"Hush, Robin! I can't stop to listen now," cried I, in a fright; for I caught sight of Mrs. Bridget at an upper window watching us, and I knew how she might turn his words. So I ran away, and left him looking sad and astonished.

After tea I went out again, and presently—oh, joy!—I saw something white under a bush by the wall; and there, sure enough, was the Mechlin cap, just where a chance breath of wind must have blown the pretty, light thing, which was hardly thicker than a cobweb.

I took it in, triumphant; but—would you believe it?—Mrs. Bridget talked as though I had sent it away by Robin, and just got it back in time to show! As for my having found it, though she did not exactly say so, she made me see that she thought it all a pretence.

Well, that was hard to bear for a girl like me; and for days after, Mrs. Bridget kept such a watch on me as made me wretched. I believe she thought I had a mind to send everything in the house away in Robin's milk-cart, by the way she locked them up. Still, I would not complain to him. Mother Sparrow had said to me last time I went to see her, and had begun to talk of Mrs. Bridget's ways with me, and of other little things which went on in the House—

“Now, honey, don't you be vexed if I give you a leaf out of an old woman's experience. Don't tell tales out of school, dearie. Service is a school for you, and you've got to be faithful, and not talk outside of what goes on within. Bear and forbear, hide faults and keep counsel; that's what I've found good for a servant to practise.”

I tried to do as she had said; but it was hard work, and I fretted.

The mistress and Miss Lily were as kind as ever, but they had other things to think of, and

did not seem to notice my sad looks. Indeed, it was about that time that Mr. Norman, a young gentleman who was staying with our clergyman, began to visit so often at the house. I could not help seeing, when I took in the tea, how constantly he looked at Miss Lily, and I fancied that she looked for his coming, and seemed pleased when he talked to her.

It was about this time, too, that the mistress began to receive some business-looking letters with big seals, the very sight of which brought such an anxious look into her gentle face.

No wonder, then, that neither of my kind mistresses seemed to notice the secret trouble of their little maid.

Robin was the only one who seemed to understand that all was not right with me; and, without pressing for an explanation, which least of all could I have given to him who was suspected with me, he took every little opportunity of showing his sympathy. Always a kind word and bright look whenever I was allowed to open the door for him, morning or evening, till I began to look forward to his coming as to the only happy moments of the day. Then it was, too, that he took to bringing me little nosegays of flowers, picked as he walked up the hills between the country hedgerows in the early

morning, bringing the milk into town. Now it was the first primrose, then the earliest hyacinths, given with just a word to say how lovely was the wood where he had found them, and how the thrushes were singing in the old trees at whose feet they grew, till by degrees I was almost won over from my trouble, and began to think less of it than of a certain brightness which, as it seemed, had come into my life through it.

Robin had always been kind to me, but now he was more than kind.

One evening, as I took in the milk, he said, smiling, "Bess, I have something for you ; it's not a field-flower this time ;" and from an empty can, where he had put it for safety, he took a twig covered with rose-coloured blossoms, and gave it to me. It was a piece of azalea, he told me, a shrub rather uncommon in those days. "It was given to me," he said, "and I thought you'd maybe like it, Bessie ; it's that bonny, the very sight of it is enough to hearten up a body, isn't it?"

Robin's kind thought "heartened up" *me*, anyhow, and I went indoors, looking lovingly at the bonny blossoms.

As I ran upstairs to my little garret to put my nosegay in water, I met Mrs. Bridget

coming down; and, standing aside on the landing to let her pass, I felt her look at me in her peculiar way; but she did not speak, nor did I show her my flower, and nothing was said on the subject till next morning. Then, as I was washing the back passage after breakfast, I heard Miss Lily come to the kitchen window looking upon the garden where she had been busy among her flowers, and say in a troubled voice—

“Bridget, only fancy! that pretty branch of my favourite azalea which was just coming into blossom has been carried off since yesterday afternoon. It was all right and looking lovely when I came in from the workhouse, and now it’s gone! Who *can* have done it?”

“Was it anywhere near the gate, Miss Lily?”

“Yes, just inside. But nobody could have reached it from the street.”

“It’ll have been one of the tradesmen, then, Miss Lily, depend upon it. There’s that milk-lad now——”

“What, Robin Redford? No, Bridget, I can’t think that. He looks as honest as the day, and he’s been about the place since he was quite a little fellow.”

“Very likely, Miss Lily; but looks are only skin deep, as the saying is. Look here, I have

my suspicions, and I'll be bound I'll find out for you by this evening; but I'll not say anything till then. Folks say I'm cross, Miss Lily; but I'm not unjust, anyhow, and I like to leave room for confession before *I* tell tales—there!"

She came bouncing through the passage, almost knocking me over, and ran upstairs. Presently she ran down again, and I heard her go into the garden. I knew what was in her mind about Robin and me, and the evil spirit so rose up in me that I felt as if I could have gone behind and knocked her down. But I only went on washing, trembling all over.

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Bridget, coming to me presently and repeating the story of the azalea, "you've got a spray like Miss Lily's tree, in the jug upstairs. Who gave it you?"

Should I speak the truth, and make things worse for Robin, or should I not? Miss Fanny, it was a sore temptation; but father had so often told us that a lie is hateful to God, that I could not bring my tongue to it.

"Robin gave it me," I said, quite low.

"Then he stole it off Miss Lily's tree."

"You've no right to say that," I cried, blazing up; "Robin would do no such thing."

"Well," says Mrs. Bridget, quite quietly, "it's

plain enough. But I don't want to be severe. You may tell him to confess when he brings the milk to-night, and if he won't—well, then I know *my* duty. And look here, miss; whether it were Miss Lily's or not, he's no call to bring you presents, or you to take them, while you're under *this* roof. It's not modest, to say the least. I'll have no sweethearting here unbeknown to the missus. There, no excuses; you're warned, so that's all about it."

She went off, leaving me in such a state, what with anger, trouble, and confusion, that I was forced to leave off washing and gasp for breath. Of course Robin had not stolen the flower—I never dreamt of that; but would Miss Lily believe he had? And if so, what would happen to him? Then the accusation of "sweethearting!" This was almost as dreadful to me, for I had never thought of such things before. Besides, it was Robin! Oh, could he have thought me immodest? I felt my cheeks burn as I thought of it.

I was very miserable all that morning—more miserable than I had ever been in my life. I almost made up my mind to run away. But I thought of Robin and father, and my kind mistresses, and I could not do that yet. I thought of speaking to the mistress or Miss

Lily, but my heart failed me ; and besides, what had I to say ?

Well, the morning came to an end at last, and dinner too, though I could not eat a morsel.

Just as the things were washed up, and I was tidying the kitchen, Miss Lily looked in at the window and said she was going to water the borders earlier than usual, as she was going out after tea, and she wished me to help her. I went, with my heart beating very much lest anything should be said about the azalea ; for I felt I could not bear to hear her say she had begun to suspect Robin, as I feared Mrs. Bridget might have made her do.

For a long time, however, she was too busy to talk at all, and I was kept busy too, pumping the water for her and bringing it in cans for her to fill her light watering-pot. Helping Miss Lillas to garden was one of my favourite occupations, but to-day I could be happy at nothing ; and presently, what with worrying and fretting, the tears began to cloud my sight, and I had to stop several times to dash them away.

"Bessie," said Miss Lillas after a while, when we had done watering, "help me to tie up a screen of bass-matting, just to shelter my poor azalea from the street ; I can't afford to lose

any more of its pretty blossoms, and they're certainly a temptation to passers-by."

I was in such a state of tremor, that these words put the finishing stroke to my composure. I tried to hold the matting for my young mistress, but I could not hold in the tears any longer, and they came dropping down upon her pretty white hands. She raised her head suddenly.

"Why, my little Bessie, what is this? Crying?"

Her voice was soft and kind as could be, but my only answer was to drop the matting, hide my burning face, and burst out, fairly sobbing.

"Come," she said, laying her hand gently on my arm, and drawing me into a little rustic seat screened from the road by a clump of lilacs in full blossom. "Now, dear, tell me all about it."

And I did, as well as I was able; for I could not resist that sweet manner, which was more like a sister's than a mistress's.

"But oh, Miss Lily, Robin *didn't* do it!" I finished by saying.

"I never thought he did," answered Miss Lily, quite quietly. "But tell me, Bessie; what colour was your flower?"

"Red," I answered, wondering; "just like a rose, ma'am."

"Well, mine is *pink*," she replied, with a smile.
"You know the difference?"

"Oh yes."

"Well, bring your spray, anyhow, and we'll look at them together and convince Mrs. Bridget. You mustn't mind her, Bessie; she's a good woman at the core, but she's had her troubles. If *we'd* had them, dear, we'd maybe have been still worse to do with. An unhappy home such as she had doesn't sweeten temper."

I went for my azalea, and when we put it by what was left of Miss Lily's, the smiles came to my face, for I knew that Robin was safe. Then Miss Lily sent me in for Mrs. Bridget.

The old woman looked at the two flowers, and then I heard her say with a sniff—

"Well, if *you're* satisfied, miss, that's all that's wanted; but *I* don't see so much difference. However, there's *one* thing still I must say, Miss Lily, just to ease my mind. There's sweethearting going on, and you ought to know."

"Well, I'll speak to Bessie," answered Miss Lily. And so she did.

I was covered with confusion, and could answer nothing but—

"Oh no, ma'am; it's only Robin."

"Only Robin? And how is it that Robin

is so very exempt?" asked Miss Lily, with an amused smile.

"Oh, ma'am, don't you know? I've known him all my life. He's just like a brother."

"Perhaps; only, you see, he's not one *really*. I don't want to find any fault, Bessie," continued Miss Lily, very kindly; "I think Robin is a very nice fellow, and I know he's a good son. Only you'll be careful, dear, won't you? We girls must always remember that we are women, and the men will always respect us the more we respect ourselves. Too much chatting at the gate is not good. If Robin *should* say anything to show he wishes you to be more than his sister, then——"

"Oh, Miss Lily, he never has; indeed, he never did!"

Miss Lilius smiled again.

"There, there, Bessie; don't be so vehement about it. There would be no harm if he did, so long as all is above-board, and as it should be; only I was going to say, if anything *should* be said, you'll tell mother or me about it, won't you?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, thank you. Only—only—there's nothing——"

I broke down in confusion.

"Well, never mind, Bessie; I should be the

last to make you fancy things. Only, as Mrs. Bridget has spoken, I thought it best just to give you a word of warning. You won't give her cause to complain in earnest, I'm sure. There, mother's coming in, and we both want our tea."

Dear, sweet young mistress! if every little servant had a friend like you, and would treat her as a friend, many a trouble would be spared.





CHAPTER V.

PROMOTION.

MRS. BRIDGET and I got on better after that. Perhaps one reason was that she fell into bad health, and I had to do a good deal for her. I have always found that helping others is almost a sure way of overcoming any dislike to them we may have had, and on the part of those helped there is generally a softening as well. Then, too, she told me the troubles of her early life ; of how her father used to drink and her mother to scold ; how her favourite brother robbed the till of the shop that employed him, and her favourite sister fell into the saddest disgrace into which a woman can sink, and then died broken-hearted. When she told me all this I grew to pity instead of blaming her, and I felt, oh, so glad, that I had tried to bear patiently with her soured temper.

If I had known at first, I thought that I should have borne it better still—nay, that I might have shown her many a little kindness that I had not thought of. Ah, yes! we should be very gentle with others, for who can tell what they may have to bear? Did not our Lord come to minister to all, even those who were not kind to Him? and is He not a servant's highest Model? Yes, Mother Sparrow was right there.

A few months after the affair of the azalea, a well-dressed, elderly man came to the door and asked to speak to Mrs. Bridget. They sat a long time in the kitchen talking together; and then Mrs. Bridget went to the parlour, quite excited, and begged leave to speak to the mistress. Her runaway brother had come home from America, a reformed character and well-to-do man, and he wanted his sister to go back with him and keep his house, when the business which had brought him to England was finished.

"And you see, ma'am, blood's thicker than water; and if poor Abel wants me, well, I suppose he must have me—that is, if you're willing, ma'am," concluded Mrs. Bridget; and, as the mistress *was* willing, Mrs. Bridget went, with many a kind word on all sides, a month later.

"Bessie," said the mistress to me when she was gone, "I shall not get another servant in

Bridget's place, for I've had money losses lately which will greatly lessen my income. Besides, I may as well tell you—for I can trust you not to talk just yet—we're to lose Miss Lily soon ; Mr. Norman is going to take her from me." I smiled, for I had guessed *that* long ago, yet my heart sank to hear that my guess was true ; for what should we do without Miss Lily ? " So," continued the mistress, " I will offer the place to you, Bessie, if you like to take it single-handed—with a rise of wages, of course. I will show you about the cooking at first, and I have no doubt you will fill this higher place as faithfully as you have filled the lower one. Will you stay with me on these terms ? "

Would I stay ! My only fear, when the mistress began to speak, had been that I might have to leave ; and I do believe it would well-nigh have broken my heart.

So it was all settled, and an easier look came upon the mistress's soft, pale face, which had looked sorely harassed of late.

" I shall be able to leave home with a quiet mind now that I know you will stay with mother, Bessie," said Miss Lily, with a pretty blush, as Mr. Norman left that evening. Mother's told you all about it, she says. You've been so long with us, that we feel you to be like a friend. How long is it ? Five years ? "

"Six years, ma'am, come next June," I answered, flushing with pleasure, and counting several months in advance, for I was still given to looking forward.

"Like a friend." That was what had brought the flush to my face, and had made my heart warm with something better than pride; and when I went to see Mother Sparrow that evening I repeated the words to her with the rest of my news.

"'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you *friends*,'" said the old woman, with a bright smile. "That shows you have tried to be what a servant should, honey—*faithful*. And so you are to get the higher place? Weil, that's as it should be too, and it reminds me of another Bible verse: 'Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; be thou ruler over many things.' The end is yet to be said, dearie, both for you and me. I look forward to hearing the Master say it to us both one day, little Bessie. May He grant it!"

She was silent for a few moments; then she added, dreamily—

"Faithful! Ay, the hardest trial is maybe to come yet; but there's strength for them that ask."

I did not know whether she was speaking of me or of herself ; but the words made an impression on me, which was deepened by what came after. Besides, they were the last words of any moment which I heard from my dear old friend, for she passed away not long afterwards. Well, death did not take her unawares ; she had always "looked forward to it," as she said in her bright, hopeful way ; and I knew full well what *that* meant with Mother Sparrow. She had honestly tried "to do her duty in the state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her," and she could trust the Master she had served not to be "extreme to mark what was done amiss."

I attended her funeral with the mistress's permission, and many a tear it cost me ; for she was the first friend I had ever lost. We lost Miss Lily soon afterwards, though in a different way.

That *was* a pretty wedding. I mind it all so well ! Miss Lily came to my room as I lay in bed the night before ; she had on her white dressing-gown, and her shining hair was also hanging about her shoulders, so that she looked almost like one of the angels in the church window.

"Bessie," she said, "I thought I *must* see you alone just for a moment, and all seems in such a bustle now. But I want to ask you to take care

of mother for me. Dear mother! she's not strong, and she will miss many a little thing I've been used to do for her."

"No, ma'am," I said, "she shan't miss them if I can help it. Only you see, Miss Lily, she'll miss *you*, whatever I can do for her; and oh, I shall miss you too!"

"But it'll not be for so very long, I hope, Bessie; only a year or two, Mr. Norman thinks. You see, this is such a good appointment he has got in China, that it seemed a pity to refuse, though we *do* feel it's a long way to go from home, and I don't like leaving mother." She paused a moment, then added quickly, "Bessie, may I ask something?"

Pretty, bright creature, how sweet she looked! I verily believe if she had asked for my two hands at that moment I would have cut them off for her. But that was not what she wanted.

"Bessie," she said, "will you stay with mother as long as ever you can? You won't leave her for a trifle, will you?"

"No, Miss Lily."

"I should like to ask you *never* to leave her," my young mistress went on eagerly; "only I've no right to ask that, and you would be wrong to make a rash promise. We must keep ourselves free to follow God's bidding, whatever it

may be ; but you won't go without telling me, will you ? ”

“ No, Miss Lily.”

That promise seemed simple enough, and Miss Lily went away satisfied ; but the time came when even that little promise cost me a world of thought. It seems to me now that we often promise away our future too lightly to our fellow-men, forgetting that we are *God's* servants first of all, and not knowing how He may want our time. Dear Miss Lily knew this, and often since then I have thought upon her words ; yet even Miss Lily, could she have foreseen what was to come, and knowing how weak a girl's judgment is apt to be, would, I think, have added, “ If you can.”

Well, well, promise or no promise, I do not think I could have acted differently to what I have done ; its absence could but have made me feel more free to choose, when God set me the question to work out.

“ Looking forward ? ” Ay, Miss Fanny, I'm but a poor story-teller after all. It was a sunny wedding ; not a cloud in the sky all day. Sun shone into the bride's bedroom when we dressed her ; sun lit up her way to church ; and, as she knelt at the altar in her white dress, the sun sent down a rainbow of crimson and gold and blue

from the great painted window above her head. God sealed His promise once with a rainbow; and, as the mistress said, smiling through her tears, when we got home again, "I trust that rainbow is a sign that His blessing will be upon our darling for ever."

Well, Miss Fanny, I trust it was too, and that it still is; but my young mistress sailed for China with her husband that same evening, and I never saw her again.





CHAPTER VI.

"ONLY ROBIN."

I SHOULD have fretted after Miss Lily more than I did, had it not been for something which happened the very next Sunday, and which turned my thoughts into quite another path. Missus was feeling tired, and said that she would spend the day quietly at home, and that I might have both afternoon and evening out, as a holiday after my late extra work.

I was pleased enough, as you may believe, and was soon on my way home. But just as I was turning into the street where the Redfords lived, who should I meet but Robin.

"Well met, Bessie," says he. "I was just coming to see if your missus would let you take a walk with me. Will you come?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do, Robin; it's as

fine an autumn afternoon as one can see, and I've leave out till eight o'clock. But I was going up home."

"Never mind," says Robin; "I want you very particular to go with me. We'll walk into the country, shall we?"

I said "yes;" and we were soon out of the town, and walking along under the slanting sunbeams which streamed through the curds of a dappled sky across the pale gold of the stubble-fields. The red leaves fell slowly from the trees on each side of the road, and a robin, just as red, set up his little chirrup among them as we passed.

Robin walked by my side for a long time without a word. It was not often he was so silent, and I wondered what had come to him. Presently I peeped up quietly at his face. His blue eyes were looking straight before him into the blue haze of the far distance, and had a very serious expression in them; but a smile quivered about his pretty mouth (it was pretty still, though he was a man now), which showed that his thoughts were not altogether disagreeable. Just at that moment he looked round and caught me looking at him, which made him laugh, and me grow hot; why, I did not know.

"Bess," he said, "I've got something to tell

you." He paused a little, and my heart went pit-a-pat ; why, I did not know either, for what could Robin have to say to make it beat ?

"Bess," he said again, "I've got places for Bill and Mat" (those were the twins). "The mistress up at the farm has recommended them as porters in Wilson's cheese-warehouse on the quayside, and I hope they're going to settle down to work this time, and bring something in."

Was this all he had to say? *That* surely need not have made me feel in such a flutter. I felt just a little disappointed ; why, I did not know.

"Aren't you glad, Bessie?" asked Robin presently, seeing I did not speak.

"Glad? Oh yes! It'll be a help to you, Robin."

"Yes."

There was a long silence.

"Bess," said Robin at last, with a shy glance at me, "may I tell you something else?"

"Well, what?"

But I had no sooner said it than my silly heart began to beat again. What could make me feel so foolish to-day, when it was only Robin?

"Bessie, I've been thinking——"

"What ails the lad, to make him stop like that?" thought I. "He's generally glib enough."

"I've been thinking," he repeated.

"Well?"

"I've had it in my mind to say a long while," he went on, speaking faster, "only I didn't feel free to speak till there seemed some prospect of——"

Another pause.

"The long and the short of it is, Bessie," he blurted out, "you belong to me, don't you? There—it's time we made *that* clear!"

"What, Robin?" It was a stupid question, but I did not know what else to say.

"I found you, didn't I?" went on Robin, stopping short under a tree in which one of his namesakes was piping.

"Yes."

"And nobody else claims you, lass?"

"No."

"Well, then, unclaimed goods belong to the finder, don't they?"

"I suppose so; but——"

"No *buts*," said Robin, with his own sweet smile beaming out all over his face. "I'm not going to be cheated out of my rights, lass. You've been my baby in the old times, and you're my own lass now, and you'll be my dear wife in the future, when we are free to marry. *That's* all square, isn't it, Bessie?"

What could I say? Robin's argument was too sound for me to find a hole in anywhere; and though he *was* "only Robin," he had got the better of me, and there seemed no way to escape had I wished it, of which I did not feel at all sure. I stood, looking down on the leaf-strewn ground, too much shaken to speak; and Robin stood looking at me—giving me time, good fellow.

As we stood there waiting, little robin (I mean the bird) hopped down from his perch overhead, and sat on the road looking at us, with his wee head on one side, and his bright eyes dancing, as though he were having his laugh at us. He looked so comical that, spite of my confusion, I burst out laughing.

Robin (I mean the lad) started.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said. Then, catching the direction of my glance, he too remarked, half wondering, half offended at my laughter, "It's only robin!"

Only Robin! Yes, that was just what it was.

Then we both laughed a little; and Robin held out his hands, and what could I do but put mine into them? And so, quite unawares as it were to me, I became engaged to my Robin.

"We'll have long to wait, I fear," he said rather seriously, as we returned home. "I can't

marry till father has more help ; but the twins'll be doing well in a year or two, I hope, and then perhaps——”

“And *I* can't leave missus till Miss Lily comes home,” I said quickly.

“And when will that be ?” asked Robin.

“She said it 'd most likely be in a year or two,” I answered.

“Well, I must spare you till then, I suppose,” said Robin, with a smile, “seeing I'm not free myself. But you'll tell your missus, won't you, Bess ? for I shall want to come and see you whenever I can, you know ; and I'm not the lad to come sneaking about like a thief, as though I were ashamed. That 'ud be no compliment to you, eh, Bess ?”

“No, Robin ; and I wouldn't have you so, nohow,” I returned, with a proud look at his handsome, honest face ; for he was *my* Robin now.

Well, we went home and told the old people, and father was so pleased. And then Robin and I went to church together, and I could see by the earnest look on his bonny face, and by the way he took my hand and squeezed it after we had come out, that he looked on that as the seal of our engagement.

I told the mistress that very night, after we

had had prayers together. It was hard to get it out, and I stood for some time twisting my apron and saying nothing.

"Well, Bessie?" said the mistress, kindly, "you've something to say? Nay, don't be afraid of me, my child."

She said it so softly, and looked at me with such a kind, encouraging smile, that it helped me to go on, knowing that I should have her sympathy.

"It's Robin, ma'am," I said, looking down.

"Well, what about Robin? You mean Robin Redford, who brings the milk?"

"Yes, ma'am; and please he wants to come and see me sometimes. May he, ma'am?"

"Does that mean you're engaged to be married?"

"Yes, ma'am, if you please."

"And how if I *don't* please, Bessie?"

I felt frightened at that, but only for a moment; for when I looked up, the mistress was smiling.

"Oh, ma'am, please, it's not *now*. We don't want to be married for ever so long. He's got his parents to keep, you know; and I——" I stopped.

"Well, Bessie?"

"I couldn't leave *you*, ma'am—not till Miss Lily comes home again."

When I said that, I saw her sweet delicate face quiver all over, and she rose from her seat and came and took my hand.

"Thank you, Bessie," she said. "It would be a great comfort, for I don't feel as if I could bear strangers about me just now. But I don't want to be selfish. You're *sure* you don't want to leave at present?"

"Oh no, please ma'am,—indeed I don't; only——"

"Only what, my child?"

"*May* Robin come sometimes?"

"To be sure he may. I'm so glad you've spoken to me about it. The mistress should always be looked on as a friend by the maid, I think; and you and Robin shall not lose by treating me as you have done. Good night, and may God bless you and him, my child."

I went to bed, happy in the thought of Robin; all the more so, I am sure, that I had told the mistress. I've often been called old-fashioned in my notions, Miss Fanny; but I don't see how folks can look for a blessing on such things if they go about them underhand.



CHAPTER VII.

WAITING.



YEAR passed, then eighteen months, then two years, and life went very brightly and smoothly for me. Smoothly, for I had things to myself in the kitchen, and no one to please but my sweet, gentle mistress, whom I grew to love and reverence more and more every day. She was an excellent cook, and her lessons soon made me well able to do what was wanted in that way. What a pride I took in it! How pleased I was when I had made some little dish in such a way as to tempt her delicate appetite; and how much I enjoyed making the jellies and soups and dainty puddings which she carried constantly to her sick poor! Father got many a one, and he *was* pleased when the mistress told him who had cooked it. Some-

times she let me go with her to carry the basket, and the feeling she gave me of helping in her charities was very sweet to me.

Then how bright my life became through Robin's love! He never wasted his time or mine by coming when either of us ought to have been about our work; but he contrived to have a quiet half-hour with me in my cosy kitchen many an evening, and missus would often let me ask him to tea—he wouldn't have touched it without her invitation. Every day, too, when he came with the milk, he would bring me a little posy while there were flowers to make it of; and when I had a Sunday afternoon out, and we took a walk into the country, what plans we laid for our future life!

Poor little Ruth was dead, so there was a mouth less for Robin to feed; and Bill and Mat seemed steadying down at last, and were doing fairly well at the cheese-warehouse, and bringing home their earnings; so Robin was able to lay by a little, and our way seemed clearing gradually. But still there was no talk of Miss Lily's coming home, and the mistress seemed to want me more than ever, for she was growing still more delicate, and had to spend many a day upon the sofa.

I think she fretted much about Miss Lily—or

rather Mrs. Norman, I should say—for though she had heard pretty constant from her at first, letters grew fewer after the first eighteen months, and at last stopped coming altogether. The last but one which my mistress got from them was from Mr. Norman, and was written after they had been in China nearly three years. In it he said that his wife sent her dear love to her mother, and told her not to fret if she did not write much for a time, as she was in delicate health, and the doctor had ordered her to keep to the sofa and not exert herself in any way. It was nothing, he wrote—nothing to be anxious about ; only a little child was expected, and in the climate where they were it was necessary that his wife should take the greatest care.

The dear mistress brightened at the mention of a grandchild ; but oh, how she watched for the post !

“I can’t expect a letter yet,” she would say, “for Mr. Norman said that his official duties called him up the country for a while ; but I do so want to hear, Bessie, and he *might* be back by now. Don’t you think so ?”

I said what I could to soothe her ; but when week after week passed and still there was no letter, I grew uneasy also. It was then, too, that my promise to Miss Lily first began to

trouble me. Supposing she should never come back ; supposing anything should happen to prevent my consulting her, should I be bound to stay as I was while the mistress lived ? Much as I loved my dear mistress, the idea came to me with a terrible chill, for I thought of Robin, and of the life we had planned to live together.

He began, too, about that time to wish me to set a limit to our waiting-time. We had been engaged now about three years ; the twins were able to maintain their parents and eldest sister ; Annie, the youngest, was out at place ; and Robin and I had laid by nearly enough to start us in our married life.

"Let us fix Easter week," said Robin, as he brought me a great bunch of holly, and helped me to deck the kitchen with some of it on Christmas Eve.

"No," said I ; "I can settle nothing till Miss Lily comes back."

That was always my answer, and Robin was getting a little tired of it.

"But we can't wait for ever for Miss Lily," he replied, trying to balance a sprig of holly on one of my tin dish-covers which glittered on the wall, and tumbling it down with a great clatter.

I was vexed. "Just look there !" I cried. "I shouldn't wonder if you've awakened the missus

with your noise. She was just spent, and lay down for a little nap when I took out the tea I do think you're selfish, Robin."

He went and stood by the fire, quite quiet for a minute or two; then he spoke, and his voice had a little tremble in it.

"Maybe I am, lassie. But I've waited long. I've tried to be patient, Bessie; but—I want my wife!"

Then I was sorry for my sharp words. I went up to him, and laid my hand on his arm.

"And you'll be patient a little longer, laddie, won't you? Think of the poor mistress, and how good she's been to me. And oh, Robin, don't think it doesn't cost me something too!"

Then he kissed me, and gave way, and no more was said about the matter just then. January came and went, and though Robin looked wistful, he forbore to press me.

At last the postman brought a letter from China. It was in my young mistress's handwriting, and my heart danced for joy as I took it into the parlour. You should have seen the light which came into the mistress's poor worn face! Such a flush of colour rose in her cheeks as made her look quite young and pretty; but her hands shook sorely as she took the letter and tore it open.

"You may wait a minute, Bessie," she said. Then she unfolded the precious letter and read it eagerly. It was very short, and she was soon finished.

"It's good news, Bessie," she said, her voice shaking with excitement. "Miss Lily tells me the perfect rest has done her good already, but that the doctor is still quite as strict in forbidding any exertion ; that is why her letter is so short. Mr. Norman is still up the country on very important business, but she trusts he will be back before the event. Think of my being a grandmother soon, Bessie! Won't it be nice! Let me see, when was the letter written?"

She looked at the date and the postmark, and her face fell.

"It's been twice as long on the way as usual," she said slowly. "Oh, Bessie, this anxiety is very hard to bear! If it weren't for God and for *you*, Bessie," she added, with a tearful smile, "I hardly know how I should bear it at all."

That touched me deeply, and I was very glad I had not settled to be married at Easter.

A week after that another letter came. It was not in either Mr. or Mrs. Norman's handwriting ; but it had a broad black border, and I felt sorely afraid to give it to the missus. There

was no help for it, however, so with a little prayer in my heart I took it in.

Shall I ever forget the scene which followed?

The mistress turned as white as a sheet when she saw the letter, and before she had read it through she gave a sudden cry, and fell back on the sofa.

Finding that I could not bring her round anyhow, I rushed in next-door, where Miss Tidy, a great friend of the mistress, lived. She came directly, and a doctor was called, who told us at once that the poor mistress had had a paralytic stroke.

The news which had brought it on was this. Mr. Norman had been treacherously murdered while on his expedition up the country, and the shock of hearing of it had been too much for his wife. A little child was born, but the mother did not live many hours after. The letter was from the doctor who was attending Miss Lily. *You* were that child, Miss Fanny. Well, dear, what could I do then but give up all idea of my marriage—for the present, at least? That was what I did, anyhow, for I felt it would be worse than selfish to leave my poor mistress alone in her sickness and sorrow. But it cost me many a good cry.

Robin and I talked it over. The dear lad was

so good and patient about it, for he was longing to take me home ; but he saw I was right, and we agreed to wait another year, at all events. Perhaps matters might be smoothed for us in some way before then, we said, more to cheer each other than from any definite prospect there was.

Then you were brought home, Miss Fanny. Such a poor, little, weakly infant ! The mistress was a little better by that time, though she could not stir from her sofa, and her mind was never quite as it was before. It was arranged that I should have a girl to help me, for the nursing and housework were more than I could manage alone ; but whenever I could spare the time I carried you into the parlour, and it was good to see how the sad eyes of the poor invalid brightened when they rested upon her little grandchild.

Your other grandmother was abroad with a sick daughter at that time, so it was settled that till she came home you were to live with us, and after that, according to a will Mr. and Mrs. Norman had left, you were to live between the two houses.

During that year I tried my best to cheer and comfort my poor mistress, and I could see that daily she clung more and more closely to me,

and dreaded even the sight of a stranger. I couldn't help seeing it; and though it pleased me in one way, it made me very sad in another, for the chain seemed to be drawing more tightly round me, and what should I do about Robin when the time for a final decision should come?

I had once hoped to train a young servant to take my place; but I was not very fortunate in my girls, and the mistress looked uneasy if any one but I waited on her.

At last the year went by, and as the mistress seemed in some degree to have got over the shock, and was still gaining strength, Robin thought I might break the idea of my leaving to her. That was a hard time for me, Miss Fanny, for for the first time, Robin and I were in different minds as to what was right. He was of opinion that I had done my full duty to the mistress in waiting as long as I had, and that, if I were once away, she would reconcile her mind to having another servant. But then his view was taken from the outside, and he did not know the mistress and her ways as I did.

"If we go on like this, we may spend our whole lives waiting, Bessie," he said; "for did not the doctor tell you that Mrs. Johnson would probably live to be quite an old woman?"

That was true. But then, I thought, there

will be her granddaughter growing up by-and-by; and if I leave her in her need, how shall I answer to Miss Lily for her trust? I *could* not decide.

"Robin," I said, "give me a week to think it over, and then you shall have my answer."

I thought over the matter a great deal that week; I tried to look at it from every side, and I prayed that God would help me to a right judgment. You know the collect for Whitsun day? Well, I found that just met my need.

At last I thought I would ask the doctor who was attending the mistress whether he thought I might speak to her on the subject without hurting her. Of course *he* looked at the subject altogether from his patient's point of view, and he advised me not.

"She is in no state to have her mind troubled about anything," he answered. "And if you *can* stay with her for the present, Elizabeth, do. A change in those about her might throw her completely back."

My heart sank. I thought of consulting a clergyman, and if there had been one I could have gone to, feeling sure he would help me, I would have done so; but the vicar at our church was abroad, and a stranger filled his place. Miss Tidy also was away.

I sat down to think on the last evening at the window of my little room, and, as I thought, a thing that Mother Sparrow had once said to me came into my mind. "If you have to decide between two courses, and cannot tell which is the right one, take the one you like least; for, depend upon it, self-pleasing is in the other scale, and inclining to weigh it down."

I knew, of course, how my heart was inclining me, and must I take the other path? It almost broke my heart to do it, and yet it seemed God's will that I should remain at my post, and not be married yet awhile. I fell on my knees in an agony, and as I knelt there I seemed to hear the words, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Yes, I thought, I must give up all thought of marrying for the present. If Robin consents, well and good, but if he is not willing to wait, I must make up my mind to let him go. Then a strange, sad calm came over me, and I slept as I had not slept for weeks.





CHAPTER VIII.

PARTING.

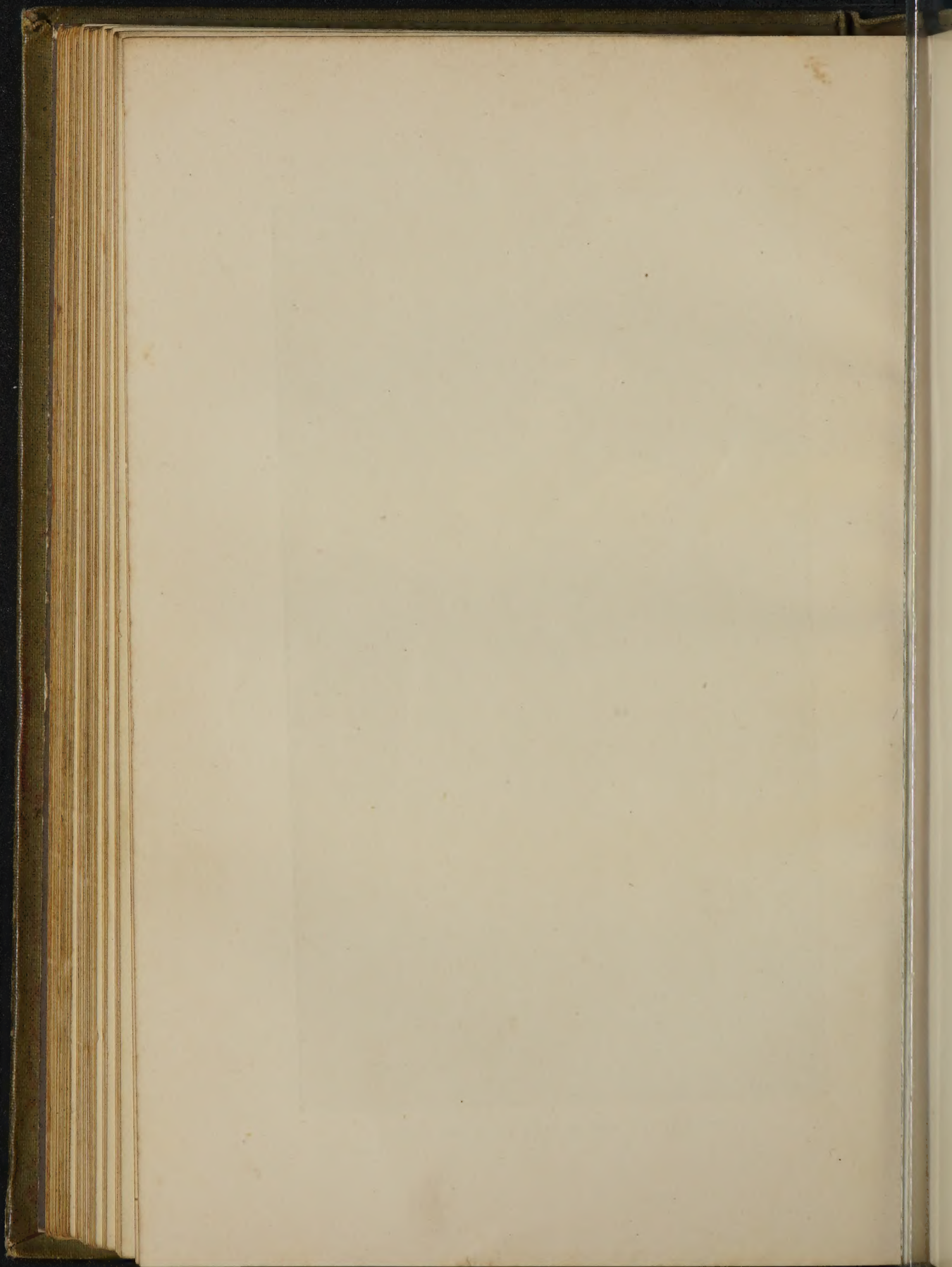
NEXT day Robin came for his answer, and I gave it to him as I have said.

Miss Fanny, I would rather not speak of that scene, for it required all my strength to go through with it, and even now it makes me sad to think of the pain I gave him. I was suffering so much myself, that I spoke to him in a hard, dry way, which made him think I did not care. I repeated my answer like a lesson, and when I came to the words, "You are free to do as you like; it would not be fair to hold you to your promise when all is so uncertain," he burst into angry words, saying that I had trifled with him, that he knew I did not care for him after all, and that I might take my freedom back. Then he broke into a kind of sob and left the house,



I WENT TO HIM AND HE TOOK ME IN HIS ARMS.

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and I—oh, Miss Fanny, I cried till I was well-nigh blind, and only the soft touch of your little fingers, as you lay by my side in bed, prevented me from growing crazy with grief.

A fortnight passed. The wedding-day which Robin would have had us choose, came and went, and still I saw nothing of him. At last—it was a Sunday evening, and I was reading my Bible by the fading light, and rocking your cradle with my foot—I looked up at the sound of a step on the gravel, and saw Robin pass the window. He came in—for it was a warm evening, and the yard door was standing open—sat down by the table without a word, leaned his elbows upon it, buried his face in his hands, and burst out sobbing.

“Robin!” I said, quite frightened. “Robin, what is it?”

He lifted up a white, miserable face.

“Bessie, you were right,” he said, “and I was wrong. God has shown me that. Can you forgive me?”

“Robin—my Robin!”

I do not know what else I said, for I went to him and he took me in his arms.

“Yes,” he said presently, when we were a little calmer, “I see now that it was not God’s time. Bessie, I am glad you acted as you did,

and that we are still free to do our duty ; for, lassie, lassie, a great trouble has come, and I am once more all they have to look to at home ! ”

“ What is it, Robin ? ”

“ It is disgrace—the one thing we have been spared yet. Mat and Bill have been surprised by the police in a drunken frolic, and have escaped and run away to sea. They say some of the police were hurt in the scuffle, and that, had the lads been caught, the sentence must have been severe. There, Bessie, it is all over with us for the present, for even if you would consent to marry, I could not.”

“ Never mind, Robin dear ; I will wait for you if you will wait for me. If it be God’s will, He will open the way for our marriage some day ; and if not—— ” I paused, for the words stuck in my throat.

“ And if not, God’s will be done.”

It was Robin’s sweet, deep voice which had finished the sentence for me ; and we both bowed our heads. But I was happy, Miss Fanny—I was happy ; for had not God taken the matter quite out of our hands, and made our duty clear to us ? And had He not given me my own Robin back again ?

But the years went on and on, and still our

wedding-day seemed as far away as ever. We heard nothing of the twins, but still the old folks at home lived on, and Robin and I worked for them. You, Miss Fanny, grew up a strong, healthy child, and happy I was whenever it was your turn to live with us. And the dear mistress went on much the same, growing gradually stronger, it is true, but still seeming to want me as much as ever. Robin and I had become more reconciled to waiting. We were still young, we saw each other daily, and we never lost hope. If God had willed to let things go on so till we were old, I think I should have been happy enough ; but such was not His will.

When we had been engaged about twelve years, the end came. I was sent for suddenly one evening to see Robin. He had had an accident. Some great waggon-horses, going down with goods to the quayside, had run away, the waggon had driven up against Robin's milk-cart and overturned it, and my Robin lay dying of the injuries he had received.

His white face lighted up with a wan smile when he saw me come in. I went and knelt down beside the bed, and put my lips to the hand which tried to grasp mine. He was not able to talk much, but he liked to have me with him, and now and then he would say a few

words, which I treasured up to last for a lifetime.

"Bessie," he said once, "I've been thinking that perhaps this is why God did not let us marry. I might have been leaving you with a young family, and then how much worse I should have felt it! Depend upon it, dear, it's best so." And again: "You'll do what you can for the old people, Bessie, for my sake? There's a little money, which was to have been for our wedding plenishing, laid by at my bed's head. That'll keep them for some time. You'll see to it, lassie? And, Bessie, if the twins come home again, as I pray God they may, you'll be good to them, won't you? And tell them I bear no malice; they're my brothers still. Try and say a word, lassie, to lead them right. There, that's my trust to you, dear, and I know you can keep a trust, thank God."

I promised. Then he dozed a little; after which he said—

"Don't take on too much, lassie; I've been thinking that God 'll make it all up to us hereafter. We've had to do without our good things here, lassie—like Lazarus—you and I; but He's maybe keeping them all for us in heaven—and a great deal better ones too. Don't you think so?"

I stroked his hand, and a great peace came into my troubled heart. Might it not indeed be as my Robin said?

The clergyman came—our old vicar, who had prepared Robin and me for Confirmation, and given us our First Communion—and I left Robin awhile with him, and went to sit with the poor old father and mother, who were mazed with grief.

After a time the vicar came to call us in to share the Last Sacrament. Turning to the old people, he said in a voice which he could not keep quite steady—

“You may thank God for such a son. There are few young men who can meet death as he does. Such a pure, upright, unselfish life I have seldom come across; and yet such perfect humility—such perfect reliance on a higher than he!”

I heard the words with a proud glow amidst all my sorrow, and I thanked God for my Robin.

Then we all knelt by him for the last solemn rites. But I cannot speak of that.

The pale dawn was shining in at the window as the last words were said, and as Robin lay back with the pure light on his face, I thought it had never looked more beautiful.

Faithful unto death he had been indeed, and the foreshadowing of the crown seemed already upon his brow.

The old couple were led weeping from the room, but I sat with him to the very end. How well I remember his last words! May he greet me with them when we meet above!

"God bless you, lassie," he said, with his own beautiful smile. "Faithful, is it not? Faithful to the end!"

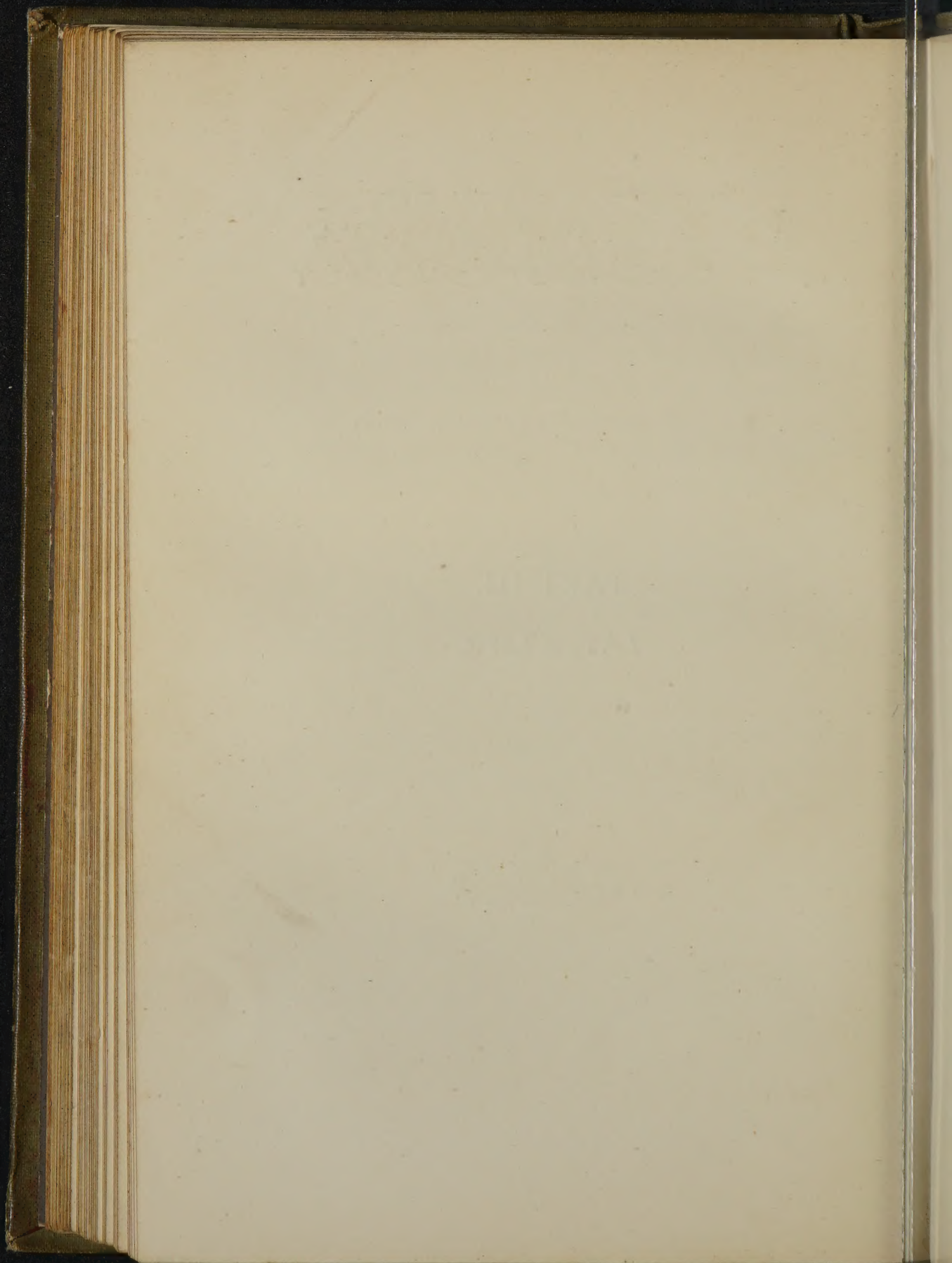
Amen, my Robin! so be it.





PART III.
LATER LIFE.







CHAPTER I.

LINKS BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN.

I ALWAYS reckon that night by Robin's death-bed as the close of my youth. Though still a young woman in years, I felt as though the first brightness and freshness of life had gone from me with my Robin. My treasure was now in a better place, and I knew that it was to another world than this that I must look forward for the fulfilment of my hopes. Still, after the first keen grief was over I was not unhappy. I had my place to fill on earth and my work to do; I knew that I was wanted, and I determined, God helping me, to be faithful unto the end. Though the morning brightness was over, there was still the busy, cheerful afternoon, and the sweet calm of evening to come for me. I was not alone; I had Robin's and Miss Lily's trusts

to fulfil, and I found a wonderful comfort and strength in the thought that five helpless people whom I loved were more or less dependent on my care.

Then I had the feeling of Robin's nearness still. Not always : there were times when I felt very far removed from him ; when my heart longed after him with a dull, aching pain, and the thought of the years that must pass before I could go to him seemed endless. But it was not often I felt like that. As a usual thing, there was a sweet comfort in the thought that we might still be helping each other—I on earth, he in Paradise.

The mistress and I were reading a book at that time ; I cannot remember its name, but there was much in it about the Communion of Saints. I had repeated the article about it in the Creed many a time before, but never till now did I realize what it really meant. That book and my feelings about Robin taught me ; and never did I kneel in prayer without the thought that Robin was joining with me, never did I strive to do my duty without the feeling that he and I were working together ; for do we not pray, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" ?

Robin's name had been in my prayers since the day when, as little children, we said them at

father's knee ; and oh, Miss Fanny, it hurt me sore to think that now I must leave it out ! But that book said there could be no harm anyhow in putting the names of those who are gone in the prayer for the Church militant. It was a great comfort to me to use it night and morning ; and after the words, " We also bless Thy holy Name for those who have departed this life in Thy faith and fear," I always added, " especially Robin."

It was at the Holy Communion, however, that I felt my nearness to him most of all, and a new sense came into the beautiful words, " Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name ;" for I knew that this must be Robin's chief work now. The Book said that the closer we live with God, the nearer we shall be to those who have gone to Him ; for it is in Him we must look to meet. And surely, Miss Fanny, it was right.

My dear mistress was a greater comfort to me at that time than I can tell you. Her mind was much clearer again, and what it had lost in earthly keenness, seemed more than made up by a wonderful insight into heavenly things. She and I had both lost the one we loved best, and the power of sympathy which the dear lady

possessed, made her enter into my trouble, thus drawing us daily nearer each other. She liked me to read to her, and I learnt a deal from those books, and from her comments upon them.

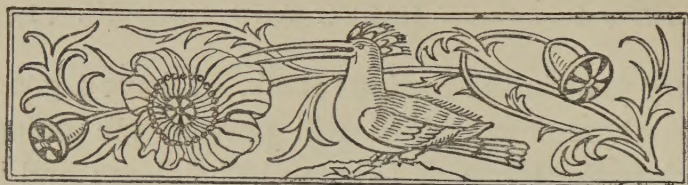
I do not think, Miss Fanny, she ever knew of the struggle I had had in my mind about staying on with her. Once or twice she had asked me about my engagement with Robin ; but that was after the twins had gone to sea, and then I could answer truly that Robin was not in a position to marry. *Now* I felt glad I had never troubled her on the subject, for of course I had no longer any thought but of serving her to the end.

Robin's youngest sister came home from service to attend on his old father and mother, and the mistress managed that she should have many a day's work with us ; for unless *you* were with us, Miss Fanny, I had no need of a girl, and could do very well with occasional help. The old people, however, did not live more than a year after Robin, and then the mistress came to our help again, and got Lizzie admitted to a blind asylum.

Both sisters are gone home now, Miss Fanny. I have outlived all my adopted family. As long as they lived, however, I saved for them. I did not want nearly all my wages, and the mistress advised me to put by some pounds

every year in the Savings Bank. I have a good sum there now, which will prevent me going back to the House if I live to be helpless ; and if not—well, I have made my will, Miss Fanny. You'll find it in my box when I am gone, if God should call me while I am still in service.





CHAPTER II.

"A KENT FACE."

THERE was one thing left, however, on which I had set my hopes, and for which I asked every time I knelt down to say my prayers ; and that was that God would bring Robin's brothers home again, as reformed characters, like that runaway brother of Mrs. Bridget's.

The thought of their disgrace, and that, in all probability, they were still living in sin, had been the one thing which had troubled my Robin on his death-bed. Often and often when I went out for a walk, or on errands for the mistress, I would pause for a moment at the quayside to see the homeward-bound vessels come in, and to question the sailors about the twins. But I never could get any information.

When I visited the workhouse, too—the mis-

tress often sent me there with little comforts for the old men and women—I always kept a look out, lest by any chance Robin's brothers might be there. But as the years rolled on and brought no tidings, I begun to fear that they also were dead, and that I should never have the happiness of welcoming them home in Robin's name, and of giving them his last message.

God, however, had not been unmindful of his prayers and mine. Is He ever, do you think, Miss Fanny? It seems to me as though He must have His own good time for answering every earnest, faithful prayer; and that if it is not granted here, it will be hereafter, in some much better way than we had thought for. It was Robin's dying words partly which led me to think of this, and partly something which happened when I had prayed that prayer, morning and evening, for well-nigh twenty years.

I had ceased to be a young woman then; the grey hairs on my head were as many as the brown; the lines were being ruled daily deeper on my face; but still my strength was as good as ever, and I was able to serve my mistress just as well as when I was young. She, dear lady, was getting very old and feeble, for there were nearly thirty years between us, and the difficulty of getting her from her bed to her sofa became

daily greater. I used to thank God often for my strength, which enabled me to do it. Well, it was on my fifty-second birthday, just eight years ago, that God sent an answer to our prayer—I mean Robin's and mine. The mistress had her friend Miss Tidy with her that afternoon, and she asked me to go and read to an old man in the workhouse who used to do odd jobs for her in the garden after Miss Lily was married. He was an old friend of mine, too, and I turned into a tobacconist's shop to get him a "bit baccy," as he called it, for his pipe. It was a real pleasure to me to take little presents to the people in the House, for I could not help remembering how bare of enjoyments life had seemed when I lived there; and now I had so many comforts about me, it seemed a sort of duty to do what I could to brighten the lot of the poor inmates.

My old friend was in bed with "the rheumatics;" but he said he would be "main glad" if I would read him a chapter of the Bible, for his hands were so stiff he couldn't well turn the pages. I read for a while, but it was not so easy as usual, for many a time I was interrupted by the strange, incoherent murmuring of the occupant of the next bed.

"He's been going on like that nearly ever

since they brought him in," said old Jacobs, mysteriously. "I don't know well what's took him, but it's likely all along of the drink."

I looked at the man. His face was puffed and disfigured, his eyes looked out wildly from a shock of yellow hair, and his thin hands kept clutching at the bedclothes. It was a repulsive face, a face defiled as by a long course of evil living, and yet there was something in it which made me suddenly think of Robin.

Have you ever seen your face in a cracked looking-glass, Miss Fanny? Yes? Well, then, you'll know what I mean. In that degraded countenance there was a look of Robin's pure, honest face, yet all distorted and spoilt.

"Go away!" shrieked the wretched man, thrusting both hands wildly out before him. "Go away! I won't have you grinning at me like that."

"It's not you, Elizabeth; he's not speaking to you," said old Jacobs, seeing my look of alarm. "Never you mind him; he's light-headed like, and always seems to think he's seeing something dreadful. Eh, missus, what an awful thing the drink is!" If a young fellow could have a look at a wretch like this, when he's first tempted, to see what may be the end of the course—eh dear! but I think he'd be frightened to touch another drop.

I went away, but that look of Robin haunted me. What if *this* should be one of his brothers? And yet I could not think it. I could not believe that the gay, careless, handsome twins could ever be like that. I thought, however, I might as well set my mind at rest by making inquiry of the workhouse master, and the next spare hour I had, I went to the House for that purpose.

I could not learn much—nothing, indeed, beyond the fact that the man was a sailor, and had been discharged from his ship and brought there in his present condition. Old Jacobs was right; his state was due to a life of incessant drinking. Would he come round? I asked. The doctor thought that he might possibly regain his senses, but that perfect recovery was very doubtful. They promised to let me know if anything further were discovered.

A few days later I went back. Just as I was entering, the master met me and stopped to speak.

"We were going to send you word about that sailor, Miss Ellis," he said, "but you've saved us the trouble. He's pretty sensible at times now; but his strength is very low, and his constitution well-nigh ruined. He gives his name as William Smith, but I doubt if it's the real one. Would you like to see him?"

I said "yes," and went upstairs. Old Jacobs was fast asleep, but his neighbour was lying with his eyes wide open, and a feverish flush on his face. As I went up the room I saw the eyes turn and fix themselves on me with a strange puzzled expression. I took the chair between Jacobs' bed and his, and sat down without speaking. My heart was beating very fast—faster than it had done for many a day. Presently I took courage, and looked from the old gardener's calm, restful face to the troubled countenance of the sailor. Now that consciousness had returned to it, the look of Robin had grown stronger; I could no longer refuse to believe it possible that this wretched man might be the brother of the man I had loved and honoured most on earth.

I beat about in my mind for something to say, for speak I must; but the sailor was before me.

"You're looking hard at me, ma'am," he said abruptly, but not rudely. "May I make so bold as to ask the wherefore?"

"Certainly, sir," I answered, trying to still the painful beating of my heart. "I thought you were a little like a man I once knew, and have lost sight of for years."

"What was his name?"

"Redford."

The man started.

"And his christened name?"

"Well, they were twin brothers I was thinking of, and as like as two peas. We called them Mat and Bill."

I kept my eyes on the man's face as I said the names, and saw that they were not unknown to him.

"And what may *your* name be, ma'am?" he asked.

"They call me Elizabeth Ellis."

"Bessie! Well, I *thought* there was a *kent* (known) look in the face. Though you're changed, woman—you're changed."

"Yes, and you too. You're sorely changed since the days we used to play together."

The momentary brightening of the wretched countenance gave place to a look, half-cautious, half-suspicious.

"But I've never told you who I am."

"No. Is it Mat or Bill?"

"Mat or Bill! Well, it seems you're set on ticketing me with one or other of the labels. There, I don't mind telling you who I am, for the sake of old times; but you'll not use it against me?"

"Against Robin's brother? Never!"

"Well, then, it's Bill. Mat's gone to Davy Jones long ago, poor fellow!"

"Dead?"

"Yes. But don't fret, old lass; he was never so bad as me, and he sent a message home that he died sorry—he did indeed. Poor old Mat! we'd stuck to each other all our lives, through fair weather and foul, and it was only after he was gone that I went thoroughly to the bad. Poor old Mat! he'd 'a liked well to come home again, and tried to make up—he's said so many a time; but the yellow fever stopped that."

A tear glistened in the sailor's eye, and he was silent for a minute. Presently he went on.

"I say, how's Robin? I suppose you're old married people now, eh?"

He asked the question with an ill-concealed eagerness, as though he would fain have had me answer yes; but I shook my head.

"We never got married, Bill. God took him."

"Dead? Robin's not dead? No, Bessie, don't say that."

He looked at me wistfully, and his lips shook. My heart ached for the poor fellow, Robin's brother; for, thinking of him, I seemed to feel what remorse for a great wrong must be.

"Well, I do think it was a shame to go away and leave you and him to bear all the burden. Mat's said so many a time; and he always meant to come back, he did. But there, what's the use

of talking of it? I say, tell me about the old folks? Dead too, I suppose? Well, I might have known it. There, there, I've had enough bad news for to-day; you shall tell me the rest by-and-by. Got anything to drink, old lass? or a little shag, at any rate? For the sake of auld lang syne, you know. ——, though" (he used a sailor's oath), "I *am* sorry about poor old Robin!"

Remorse—and I had been pitying him for remorse! Miss Fanny, I had then to learn that there is a worse state even than the suffering of remorse—a state in which heart and soul are so hardened with repeated sin that they cease even to feel their own degradation. Remorse may lead to repentance; but what hope is there when this last stage of hardening has been reached? I went away sick at heart, and well-nigh in despair; for I had found Robin's brother at last, and could it have been in a worse condition?





CHAPTER III.

GIANT DESPAIR AND DOUBTING CASTLE.

IS it being faithful to despair? No, I am sure it is not. It seems to me, Miss Fanny, that it is almost as bad to be faint-hearted as to be over-confident, though the one is hardly ever so much blamed as the other. And yet there is a verse in Revelation which ought to open folks' eyes, where it classes *the fearful* among the murderers, and liars, and what not, who shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. I often wonder that preachers do not notice this more; for, God knows, the sin is common enough, and if we once give way to it, how our strength goes! We are no good for helping either ourselves or other people. There's one book has a deal about it, however, and that's the "Pilgrim's

Progress." You remember about Little-faith, Miss Fanny, and how he was robbed by Faint-heart and Mistrust, and hardly escaped with his life? Well, Little-faith has been a warning to me many a time, for I've often felt just like him. But that bit about Giant Despair, who overcame even angels, but was killed by Great-heart at last, has always heartened me up again. Eh, Miss Fanny, I pity the poor things who are content to go on living in Doubting Castle all their days, for how can they ever expect to get to the heavenly country?

Yes, Mr. Bunyan at least understood the danger of faint-heartedness, for he's got it both in the lives of Christian and Christiana. I sometimes wonder if he put the best fight against it in the woman's part because he thought it was more especially the temptation of the weaker vessels, and wanted to encourage us.

But there, this is not getting on with my story; though, for sure, it was my despair about Robin's brother and what came after, that set me thinking.

Well, Miss Fanny, if I'd had a proper insight into things, as folks say, I need not have felt so low about him, for he was not so far gone as I thought. He *was* sorry for the harm he'd wrought to Robin and me, though he didn't like

to show it ; and I believe it was just that feeling of regret—for it was not much more at first—which led the way to repentance. But it was long before I could see any signs of that, and, as I said, I was well-nigh tempted to despair.

The chaplain at the House did what he could for Bill ; but the poor fellow would not listen to him at all. In fact, he would hardly speak to any one but me, and then he was surly enough, and would bear no mention of those that were gone. I went whenever the mistress could spare me, and I kept on praying ; but, except that Bill was come back, it seemed likely I should get no answer.

Things were looking their darkest, when one day, as I was reading the lessons with the mistress, I came to the history of St. Peter walking on the waves. I read on without paying special attention, for my thoughts were wandering to poor Bill, till I came to the words, "O thou of little faith ! wherefore didst thou doubt ?"

Miss Fanny, it seemed to me as if somebody else were saying them, and not I at all, and the answer seemed not to St. Peter, but straight to me.

I thought a deal about it ; and when next I went to the House, I determined to give Robin's message, whether Bill would or not.

"Bill," I said firmly, "I've something on my mind to tell you, so you'll just please to listen." And then I told him what Robin had said.

I took him by surprise like, or he'd maybe have put me off again; but—will you believe it, Miss Fanny?—I'd no sooner said the words than the poor fellow burst out crying.

He tried hard to hide his tears by turning his face to the pillow, and I turned away with a bursting heart, and couldn't say another word.

Old Jacobs was very thoughtful, for he started to talk of the weather and what not, till the poor fellow was calm again and I had got my voice back; then he said very kindly—

"The House is an ill place for a private talk; but just you never mind me, honies: I'm going to sleep, and I shan't listen."

With that he pulled the clothes over his head, and, as the bed on the other side was empty, we were not so much amiss.

"Did he really say that?" asked Bill presently, in a shy kind of way. "You're not humbugging of me?"

"Oh no! How could I?"

"Well, I might have known that, Bessie, or you wouldn't have kept on coming here to see an old hulk like me. But to think that Robin forgave me too, and said *that*! Why, if I'd had

to suffer from him what he did from me, I'd have died cursing him."

I was shocked, but tried not to show it.

"Well, there must be something in it after all," said the sailor again, after a long pause.

"In what?"

"In—the forgiveness of sins. I thought it was all humbug before."

"Oh, Bill!"

"There, there, don't pull a long face, my lass; I can't stand that. But you just look here: you may talk to me about Robin as much as you like now, and you may read to me too, if you choose. I may as well hear what's to be said on the matter, for my voyage is about over."

I thanked God that night, Miss Fanny, you may be sure, for He had already begun to answer my prayer, and I knew how glad my Robin would be. There must have been joy above over poor Bill, for sure.

Well, he lived for some time after that, and I read and talked with him constant, and after a while (to please me, he said) he let the chaplain come too, and—well, now I think he's with Robin.

And so, Miss Fanny, my Giant Despair was slain, and I never more was tempted to go into Doubting Castle.



CHAPTER IV.

LAST WORDS.

MY story is about ended, dearie ; now I have told you about Bill, there's little else remains to say. The quietest streams have the fewest turns in them, and the most peaceful lives have the fewest events. It is evening with my life now ; and though I've had the sorrow of losing my poor mistress, it's only what was to be expected, and I thank God He has let me close her dear eyes before the light has gone from mine.

We've had many a peaceful year together, and it's sweet to me to think I've been a comfort to her closing days. It was a long, long life she had, and I think the last part of it was almost the happiest, for there was nothing to worry or grieve her, and she seemed already to live in spirit in a brighter land.

In summer I used to move her sofa up to the open window, and she would lie for hours looking out into the garden at Miss Lily's flowers—we always called them Miss Lily's—and it was one of her greatest pleasures to make them up into nosegays, and send them to the dear young lady's humble friends. I always took them, and how pleased the mistress was to hear how well her daughter was remembered by the poor folks around!

Then friends would drop in, one at once—for the mistress could not bear numbers—to have a chat about the parish, or talk over the old times. This was the mistress's greatest winter pleasure, when her sofa was wheeled to the fire, and her fingers were busy knitting woollen comforts for the poor folks out-of-doors. Miss Tidy was our most constant visitor. She was the mistress's greatest friend, and had taken up many of Miss Lily's good works. She had always plenty to talk over with my dear mistress, and her visits cheered her greatly. She was always kind to me, too, and was pleased to call me her "friend." But you know her well, Miss Fanny; for indeed she's been a friend to us all for many a day, and I know there's many a one about that wouldn't have been what they are but for her teaching.

Well, well, I'm an old woman, and my tongue

runs on too much when I get upon the old friends and the old times.

It's more than a year now since the mistress took to her bed. It was a trial for her to give up the sight of the flowers, and to let her fingers rest perforce from her knitting-work. But she never lost patience—never, Miss Fanny—in her worst pain, and it was bad enough at times, as you know. And how she used to thank me for the least thing I did for her! Oh, miss, but it's a sore trial to me in my old age to think that I can never do a hand's turn for her again. But there, she's with Robin now, and her own Miss Lily, and I won't grudge her her happiness. I can think of her with them, and surely that's enough. Miss Fanny, dear, there's a bit of vacant ground in our churchyard, just between the mistress's grave and Robin's. I'd like to lie there, dearie, if so it could be managed.

But see, Miss Fanny, the fire's nearly out, and it's ever so late. Eh dear, how I've kept you out of bed with an old woman's havers! But I've eased my heart with talking it out, and I shall sleep now. Good night, my dear—good night.



POSTSCRIPT.

I FRANCES NORMAN, have but a few words to add before sending Bessie Ellis' portrait out to those for whom it is principally intended.

I have first to say that the good old woman is no longer among us. Had she been living now, I could not have drawn her from her privacy on any pretence of using her as a model, for she would have been the first to disclaim any such distinction. One of her chief virtues was her simple-mindedness, and she had no idea that her life and character were anything out of the common. That, I think, was one of her greatest charms.

Bessie went on living with me in my grandmother's old house, which I inherited, for the rest of her days. She did what little daily duties I would allow her to perform till nearly the end, and was never happier than when she could help

me in the garden—"tending Miss Lily's flowers," as she called it. Her last illness was a tedious one; but her cheerful patience never failed her, and she died at last with a smile on her face, and my grandmother's and Robin Redford's names on her lips.

Her will, drawn up in due form, was found where she had said. In it she left the bulk of her savings—amounting, with interest, to several hundred pounds—to me, "the granddaughter of her dear mistress"—the last touching proof of a life of loving fidelity spent in our service. Five pounds went to the Infirmary, and there were also small legacies to other charities.

She had her desire. We laid her by the side of her mistress and Robin Redford, with a simple stone at her head, on which you may read her name and the words which were so often on her lips and in her heart—

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."





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